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THE
VERITY AND VALUE
OF THE
MIRACLES OF CHRIST.



THOMAS COOPER.



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THE . VERITY AND VALUE OF THE
MIRACLES OF CHRIST.



THE
VERITY AND VALUE
OF THE
MIRACLES OF CHRIST.

AN APPEAL TO THE COMMON-SENSE OF THE PEOPLE.



BY

THOMAS COOPER,

LECTURER ON CHRISTIANITY :

*Author of "The Bridge of History over the Gulf of Time," "God, the Soul,
and the Future State," "The Verity of Christ's Resurrection from
the Dead," "Plain Pulpit Talk," "The Purgatory of
Suicides," "The Paradise of Martyrs," etc., etc.*

London :

HODDER AND STOUGHTON,

27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

MDCCCLXXVI.

130. 4. 190.

Hazell, Watson, and Viney, Printers, London and Aylesbury.

TO
ANTHONY JOHN MUNDELLA, M.P.

(FROM HIS YOUTH UP,
THE READY FRIEND OF THE POOR,
AND CONSISTENT ADVOCATE OF THE OPPRESSED,)

THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY HIS VERY
OLD FRIEND.

THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E .

THIS little volume is the Fourth of the series on Christian Evidences promised five years ago, in the Preface to my 'Bridge of History.'

Disputes concerning the Miracles form the *shifting sands* of theological controversy. Sceptical objections to the Miracles are perpetually taking some new shape, or the old objections are disguised and presented as if they were new. I have thus found it difficult to put into a book form the various lectures, in defence of the Miracles of Christ, that I have addressed to audiences of little learning, but, I think, of good common-sense, during the last twenty years. For my manner of defence has, necessarily, been often altered, because the mode of attack has been often changed.

‘The Bridge of History over the Gulf of Time’ is now in its fourteenth thousand; and the two volumes which succeeded that abstract of the Historical Evidences of Christianity, have not lain as dead lumber on my publishers’ shelves. I trust this popular condensation of the argument for the Miracles of Christ will meet with the like favourable acceptance, and be found useful in removing the doubts which too often bewilder even the most earnest seekers after Truth.

THOMAS COOPER.

*2, Portland Place,
St. Mary's Street, Lincoln,
September, 1876.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

	Page
I.	
WHAT IS A MIRACLE?—OR, WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A MIRACLE?	2
II.	
IS A MIRACLE POSSIBLE?	8
III.	
IS A MIRACLE PROBABLE?	22
IV.	
WHAT ANCIENT UNBELIEVERS THOUGHT ABOUT MIRACLES. A PROBLEM FOR THE ANONY- MOUSAUTHOR OF 'SUPERNATURALRELIGION'	35
V.	
A GLANCE AT THE OLD ENGLISH FREE- THINKERS: THOMAS WOOLSTON'S ATTACK ON THE MIRACLES	43

	Page
VI.	
DAVID HUME, AND THE GREAT CONTROVERSY GATHERED AROUND HIS NAME . . .	49
VII.	
WHAT SCEPTICS HOLD TO BE THEIR STRONGEST POSITION, IN REJECTING CHRIST'S MIRACLES	61
VIII.	
DID THE MAGICIANS OF EGYPT PERFORM MIRACLES BY SATANIC AID? . . .	69
IX.	
REVIEW OF THE RECORD OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES: HEALING OF THE BLIND . . .	85
X.	
REVIEW OF THE RECORD OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES: HEALING OF THE DEAF AND DUMB, LEPERS, PARALYTICS, AND OTHER DISEASED PERSONS	102
XI.	
REVIEW OF THE RECORD OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES: RAISING OF THE DEAD TO LIFE . . .	117

CONTENTS. xi

Page

XII.

REVIEW OF THE RECORD OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES:

DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL SPIRITS . . . 126

XIII.

REVIEW OF THE RECORD OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES:

**HIS DISPLAYS OF POWER OVER INANIMATE
AND LOWER ANIMAL NATURE . . . 141**

XIV.

THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST EVIDENT PROOFS OF

THE DEITY OF CHRIST 157

XV.

AFTER-THOUGHTS 165

THE VERITY AND VALUE OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES.

PEOPLE who join in discussion often find themselves entangled in difficulties they never thought of. And the "reason why" is not evident until some hours have flown in hot, angry, and fruitless debate. At length, they discover that they entered on the contest without a clear, mutual understanding of what it was they meant to dispute about.

Let us act more wisely to-night. Let us have a clear conception of the real nature of the enquiry on which we are entering. We will place a question clearly before us; and then try to frame the answer to it, as clearly. Unless we do this, we shall spend our time in vain.

I.

WHAT IS A MIRACLE?—OR, WHAT DO WE MEAN
BY A MIRACLE?

“WE see unchangeable Law in Nature,” say our leading Men of Science: “fixed law, *inexorable* law, meets us, on every side.”

And, because they say so, hundreds of simple folk are being frightened out of their belief in the Miracles of Christ, and are telling us it is quite evident to them, now, that Christ never wrought any miracles, at all.

Others, who are held to be philosophers, say they do not think so. They judge that Christ may have wrought His miracles—or, what are called “miracles”—by the operation of some unknown higher law—some law above the ordinary laws of Nature. “Nothing which takes place *in* Nature can be contrary to the universal laws of Nature,” says Spinoza. And so his disciples

reason that what are called "miracles" must, after all, be deemed natural: the power which suspends a law of Nature is just as natural, *in the Universe*, as the law which is suspended.

Brown, the Scottish philosopher, reasons that "Miracles are not contrary to the law of cause and effect: they are only effects produced by a new cause." So, also, reasons John Stuart Mill; and this seems to be the opinion of the Duke of Argyll, as expressed in his popular book "The Reign of Law." Thus, according to these reasoners, Christ's miraculous power may be considered as a new cause in Nature: a new natural power.

But, do what we call miracles—Christ's miracles—come within the proper conditions of Science? Can they, properly, be set down in the catalogue of the Facts of Science? Were they in accordance with the usual Order of Nature? This is the real question, as Dr. Mozley observes; and he is about the clearest and most powerful writer on the Miracles that has appeared in our time.

The Leprosy is a fell disease, in the East. Few cures are attempted, there. When the attempt is

made, and it succeeds, it is usually after much time has been consumed, and much medicine has been taken by the sufferer. But Christ says to the Leper: "I will: be thou clean"—and *immediately* the leper is cleansed. *That* is not in accordance with the conditions of Science, or with the usual Order of Nature.

Two hundred years ago—in the reign of our Charles the Second—Dr. Sydenham, one of the most illustrious medical names which England can boast, cured a man who was born blind. Such a cure astonished everybody: the surgical operation was a very delicate one to perform; and the patient gained sight only by slow degrees. But Christ puts clay on the eyes of a man who was born blind, and says "Go to the pool of Siloam and wash"—and the man obeys, and sees instantly. And the man undergoes a good deal of critical and sceptical handling and brow-beating, but they cannot persuade him out of the reality. "I know that I was blind, and that now I see," he still replies.

These instances of Miracle are not in accordance with the conditions of Science: they are not in agreement with the usual Order of Nature. It is

not an ordinary fact of Science that a spoken word cures leprosy or blindness, and that instantaneously. And they who tell us that such instantaneous cures must have been wrought by a higher and unknown *natural* law only theorize : they do not *prove* to us that such instantaneous cures are in accordance with the conditions of Science and with the usual order of Nature.

Again : what are commonly called the Natural Laws often act contrary the one to the other. I lift my arm, or I employ a magnet to lift a piece of iron from the floor—contrary to the force of gravitation which would draw my arm downwards, and keep the iron on the floor. You salt meat, and that preserves it for food ; but that is contrary to what a scientific man would call the law of putrefaction which would only have rendered the meat fit for the dunghill. There is nothing in these instances contrary to the facts of Science : the raising up of the iron by a magnet and the preservation of meat from putrefaction by the application of salt, are both in accordance with the usual Order of Nature and the conditions of Science.

Again: Christ changes water into wine—He calms the storm by a word—He walks on the sea—He feeds five thousand at one time, and four thousand at another time, with a few loaves and fishes; and the food which is left when all have eaten is more than it was when they began to eat—He heals the leper, the paralytic, the lame, the blind, by a word—He raises Lazarus from the dead. None of these are facts in accordance with the usual order of Nature: none of these are facts that fulfil the conditions of Science. To assert that deeds like these were wrought merely by the operation of a higher and unknown *natural* law is only to *theorize*, we say again. No proof is offered to us. It is only mystification; and we do not accept it. We will have no mistake about the real nature of our enquiry: we will be perfectly clear in our minds, at the very beginning, as to what it is we are enquiring about. When we are asked "What do you mean by a Miracle? What is a Miracle?" We reply, plainly—*A deed which is an exception to the usual Order of Nature: a deed which suspends or transcends what are called the Natural Laws, or the Laws of Nature.*

Having stated, definitely, what we mean by a Miracle, let us listen, at once, to the Doubter—who may imagine that he is not treated respectfully, unless we listen to him, *at once*.

II.

IS A MIRACLE POSSIBLE?

THAT is the question which a modest doubter will put to us, at once. Is it possible in the nature of things? he means. "Can a Miracle," he will ask—"a Miracle such as you have defined a miracle to be—a deed which is an exception to the usual Order of Nature—a deed suspending or transcending the Natural Laws—ever have been witnessed? We never see any departure from the Order of Nature, now."

And what of that? Let us think a bit.

I take it for granted that we all believe in the Order of Nature. We expect that the sun will rise and set to-morrow, and the next day, and the next. We expect that the moon will shine, and the stars glitter, for years to come. We expect the return of the seasons, as we have seen it all our lives. The farmer sows his grain, and says "The harvest

will come again, and I shall gather something : all will not fail."

But, now, can you give me *a reason* why you believe that the sun will again rise and set—the stars still shine—the seasons return—and the harvest be gathered in the future?

You will reply, "So it has been in the Past, and *therefore* the like will be in the Future."

How do you know that? You know nothing about it. There is no "therefore" in what you say. You have not, really, given a *reason* for your belief.

That the sun has risen and set in the Past, does *not* render it *certain* that the sun will rise and set in the Future. That the moon and stars have shone in the Past, does not render it certain that they will shine in the Future. That harvests have been gathered in the Past, does not render it certain that they will be gathered in the Future. That all these facts have occurred over and over again—although it may be many thousands of times—is not a ground of *certainty* that they will occur again. There is not a rational man in the world who would dare to assert **that**.

Custom—usage—is all that we can allege as the ground of our expectation and belief, in these recurrences. Animals have a like expectation with ourselves. Do you feed your dog, your horse, your swine, at a certain hour of the morning? If you neglect to feed them at the accustomed hour to-morrow morning, your dog will bark at the end of his chain—your horse will be very restless in his stable—and your pig will not squeal the notes of the Pastoral Symphony in your ears. The birds, as well as the beasts, have an expectation that things will go on as usual. The swallows return to build their nests in the old accustomed places, year by year, and expect to hatch their young; and they cross the sea again with the expectation of finding a prolonged summer in the southern clime. Even fishes and insects, by their acts, show that they expect seasons to return. Custom—habit—rules the creatures; and it is all that *we* can allege as the ground of our expectation that the usual Order of Nature will continue.

The Materialist may boldly tell us that he believes the Order of Nature, such as it is now, has always been, and always will be. But he cannot assert—

he cannot affirm—that it will always be. He can give no true *reason* for his belief. All that he can say is that it has been hitherto, and he *believes* it will always be. But that is no *reason* at all: there is no logic in it.

Since the question "Is a Miracle possible?" is put in the way of determined challenge by Doubters, let us stay a few moments to weigh and consider some of the strong terms so often employed by Professors Huxley and Tyndall, and other Men of Science.—"Fixed Laws"—"Unchangeable Laws"—"Inexorable Law."

Are what they call the Laws of Nature really "fixed," or "unchangeable," or "inexorable"?

Are there any "Laws of Nature"?

WHAT IS A LAW?

What is a Divine Law? A commandment from the Maker to His creature Man, whom He has made an intelligent and moral agent, to pursue a certain line of conduct, with the warning that Man is to be punished if he breaks the Law God has given him.

What is a Human Law? A law in Russia is simply a regulation made by the Czar, or Autocrat,

for the observance of the inhabitants of that country—considered as intelligent and moral agents. The Czar issues his *ukase*, and the law must be kept, or the law-breaker will be punished.

A law in England is a regulation made after a very different fashion. It is, first, introduced as a "Bill" into the House of Lords, or the House of Commons. There, it must be read a first and second time, and then be fully considered, clause by clause, in committee. The "report" is brought up, and then it may be read a third time, and passed. The "Bill" must go through the same kind of processes in the other House, and then it must receive the Royal Assent, before it can become a Law. It is afterwards registered on the Statute Book, and the new law is administered by the magistrates and judges of the realm, and must be observed by the English People, or they pay the penalty by fine or imprisonment,—or death, in the cases of high-treason and murder. An English law is, therefore, a regulation made for the English people, by their representatives and governors—made for them, as rational and moral agents—and

it is considered rational and right that punishment should visit the law-breaker.

But Men do not make "laws" for their horses, for their dogs, or for any living creature they possess which is not a moral agent. A Man never makes a law for his coat or his waistcoat, for his hat or his trousers, for his spectacles or his walking-stick, for his watch or his telescope, for his hatchet or his handsaw, for his wheelbarrow or his coach. Only a lunatic would make laws—or try to make them—for things which are devoid of intelligence, or for animals which are not moral agents.

So, neither does God make "laws" for rocks or rivers, for mountains or seas, for clouds or rain, for the air or the light. Rocks, or rivers, or mountains, or the air we breathe, have no intelligence—no moral agency. They could not understand or perceive a law, if God were to give it to them; nor could they be punished for breaking a law. *There are no Laws of Nature*, in the strict sense of the words. A law must have a law-maker; and the Almighty and All-wise Law-maker would never make laws for the granite and sandstone and coal and chalk—for carbon and oxygen and hydrogen

and nitrogen, and so on: for none of these can understand a law, and none can be punished for disobeying it.

I wish such phrases as "the Natural Laws," and "Law of Nature," were *not* to be found in the noblest pages of our literature. I wish that the common phrases used by our scientific men—"law" of this, and "law" of that—had never been invented, for they are sore *misnomers*.

In many instances what are so pompously called "Natural Laws," or "Laws of Nature," are simply *Facts*; and it would be far better to call them so. In other instances what are called "laws" are mere sequences, recurrences, or repetitions of the like *Facts*. And, in other instances what are called "laws" are adjustments—often wonderful and subtle adjustments of component parts.

We know of no "law" to cause like *Facts* to recur or repeat themselves: no "law" to cause component parts of things to adjust themselves. We know of no "Law of Causation" of that kind: it is denied altogether by modern Science. We only know that like *Facts* do recur or repeat themselves. But we know no *reason why*: we know of

nothing that should authorise us to call it a "Law of Sequence," a "Law of Recurrence," a "Law of Repetition." We only choose, very whimsically—I cannot help thinking—to call the recurrence, or repetition, or sequence itself, a "Law."

Will some scientific man, sooner or later, propose a *reform of blunders* in the use of scientific terms? It may be replied that the word "Law" has been used in various senses, by the best English writers, and for hundreds of years;—that Archbishop Whately, and others, have defined its various uses;—and that, without any reform, we all know what is meant, or intended, when the word is used.

But why should the word "Law" be used in a blundering sense, now the blunder is frightening people?

"INEXORABLE LAW!" solemnly enunciates Professor Tyndall!

"INEXORABLE LAW!" still more solemnly echoes Professor Huxley!

And, hearing the awful syllables, people have begun to regard "Law" as a dread, mysterious something—an unintelligent, lifeless, unconscious,

incomprehensible something—which binds the whole Universe fast—stark fast—in its power : faster than ever the world was bound by old Atropos and her sisters, according to the fables. There can be no miracles—for all is “inexorable law” ! There needs no God—for all goes on inevitably, and must go on, by “inexorable law” !

When a phrase becomes a bugbear, and only tends to frighten people—and when the phrase is only a blunder—it is surely time that the blundering phrase was changed for a better—for one more true and more philosophical.

So long as we restrict ourselves to the use of truly philosophical phrases we are not likely to get wrong. If, for instance, we talk about the Order of Nature, instead of the Law of Nature, we talk of something which we can clearly present to our understandings.

In what Men call “Nature”—this Universe, in which we live—we all perceive, most unmistakeably, a staid and settled rule or order. We perceive that a right line cannot remain a right line and yet become a curve ; and that a curve cannot remain

a curve and yet become an angle. We discern that an acid cannot remain an acid and yet become an alkali ; and that an alkali cannot remain an alkali and yet become an acid. We perceive that Matter is of different specific gravities, so that cork floats in water, while lead sinks to the bottom. We know that Heat penetrates and permeates Matter, and makes bodies larger, and also lighter as they become larger, generally. We perceive that Light enables us to see, and that it will pass through air ; through plates of glass ; and through water of a certain depth, so as to enable us to see things at the bottom of a stream. We perceive that when Heat takes the form of combustion, or Fire, it destroys the form of bodies, generally—it decomposes bodies—and causes the matter of which they were composed to take another form, though it cannot destroy Matter itself.

I need not multiply instances : I repeat that what Men call “Nature” has a certain Rule or Order stamped upon it. And the more perfectly Man becomes acquainted with the Facts and Order of Nature the better it is for himself ; the more likely he is to secure life, pleasant life ; and

the less likely he is to encounter death, or to bring suffering upon himself. On the contrary, if Man be careless of the Facts and Order of Nature, he exposes himself to constant danger. Could a man see another put his finger into a fire repeatedly, and imagine—from imperfect observation—that the finger was uninjured, the man might feel uncertain whether it were a settled fact in Nature that fire would burn, and might get his body burnt without expecting it.

Nature is God's creation; and the Divine Maker knows that if there were no settled Order in it, no provision could be made for the preservation of the lives of His creatures. If custom did not impress us with the expectation that the future would resemble the past, we should, very often, not know what to do. If the qualities of substances did not remain the same;—if wood or cork did not float on the water to-day, as it floated yesterday;—if inflammable substances were not as inflammable to-day as they were yesterday;—and if we did not believe they would be as inflammable to-morrow as they are to-day;—our lives, very often, could not be preserved.

If Nature had no order—or Man did not get acquainted with it—he could not live. Wise Bishop Butler says that the only distinct meaning of the word “natural” is “stated, fixed, settled.” And, we may, without irreverence, say it would have been unkind in God to have placed Man in a world without “stated, fixed, settled” order ; for, in such a world Man could have had no pleasant life. The establishment, or preservation, of the Order of Nature, is one of the highest proofs of God’s beneficence and of His care for Man. And, if man neglects to learn that Order, he is very blameable. Man ought to consider it his bounden duty to get acquainted with the Order of Nature ; because it is God’s Order, and God preserves it for Man’s benefit.

I say it is God’s Order. We do not stop to debate the question of God’s existence. You and I have been over that ground together, again and again ; and I trust we are perfectly agreed on that most important of all questions. I repeat, the Order of Nature is God’s Order. As regularly, and as statedly and unerringly, with regard to time, mode, or measure, as God may choose to conduct

the operations of "Nature"—that is to say, of His own Creation—they are never conducted without Him. He imparts to them no energy which enables them to go on of themselves. Nature never becomes independent of God. It exists solely by His sovereign Will and Energy. He could stop all the movements in the Universe—He could arrest all the operations of Nature—He could deprive Nature of all her forces—He could annihilate all Nature in a moment, if He chose. Otherwise He is not the Almighty, the Absolute One.

Who, then, except the most positive and determined Atheist—Who, except the man who really believes that God does not exist—shall be bold enough to affirm that Miracles are impossible? Since Nature is unconscious and unintelligent, and knows of no laws, neither can obey them ;—since even the wisest Man of Science, or the profoundest philosopher, can tell us of no Law of Causation why the Facts of Nature are repeated, or recur, in the same mode or manner, or at stated times, day by day ;—since Nature exists solely because God keeps it in existence ;—since it is His energy alone which continues the operations of Nature ;—who

shall dare to say that He cannot, if He chooses, suspend the usual Order of Nature, or, by some act, and for some reason worthy of Himself, transcend the usual Order of Nature?

We affirm our belief, from the reasons we have rendered—and, I trust, it is the unanimous and united decision of this audience—that *a Miracle is possible: i.e.*, a deed which is an exception to the Order of Nature : a deed suspending or transcending what are called the Natural Laws, or the Laws of Nature.

III.

IS A MIRACLE PROBABLE ?

THIS is another weighty question asked by the doubter—"Suppose you have shown that Miracles are possible, is there any reason to be alleged, worthy of God, why Miracles should be performed? How can the universe which God has made so admirable, as it regards its order, need to be altered? How can the beautiful order God has instituted need to be mended?"

One wonders that everybody does not see at once that this is an entire misrepresentation of the whole question. No Christian supposes or believes that a Miracle is intended to mend the order of Nature, or correct some defect in it.

A Miracle has a meaning and a purpose of its own : a purpose which the usual Order of Nature could not effect. A miracle is not intended by the Almighty to mend the order of unconscious and

unintelligent Nature ; but to produce an effect on the minds of God's intelligent creation, and to make way for a spiritual and saving change in them.

It cannot be unworthy of God, or inconsistent, or a sign of imperfection, in Him, to institute an Order of Nature for one purpose, and to transcend it for another and a higher purpose. He sullies none of His attributes by suspending or transcending the order of Nature. The order of Nature is useful to His creatures ; but He transcends that order for a higher use, and one still more worthy of Himself.

Our moral nature is inexplicable—we can give no reason why we have a moral nature—if there be no Moral Governor. And as this our moral nature proclaims to us that vice deserves punishment and virtue reward—and yet vice often goes unpunished and virtue unrewarded, in this life—we clearly reason that God's moral government is only *begun* here, and that there must be a future state where it shall be *completed*—where vice shall be justly punished and virtue rewarded.

If there be no future state, we feel that our pre-

sent existence with this moral nature—with this sense of condemnation when we do wrong, and of approval when we do right—is a puzzle that none can unravel. We ask ourselves “What does it all mean? Why are we here? Why have we this moral nature, if there be no future state?” We feel we might just as well have had no existence at all, if there be no future life for us.

But, even with this strong conviction, we could have had no certain knowledge of a future state, if God had not revealed it to us. Neither could we know what preparation we have to make for that future state, without Divine revelation. No reflecting man is without a sense of sin. It is in vain that he turns to that false philosophy of Necessity, and tries to persuade himself that there ought to be no praise and no blame for actions, and that none of us are really guilty creatures. Conscience will be too strong for such a man. It will compel him—if he continues to reflect—to confess that he is a sinner. As a sinner, he needs reconciliation to his Maker. How is he to be reconciled? The Christian revelation fully and triumphantly answers that most important of all

questions : "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself: not imputing their trespasses unto them."

But, how is Man to be assured that Christ, the Reconciler, is divinely sent—that His mission is true? The purity, the sinlessness of Christ's life *ought* to have induced *all* men to believe Him—some of you may say; but the Saviour Himself does not say so. He tells the Jews plainly that, if any man will do the Father's will, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God"—but Christ does not say this of any man who will *not* do God's will. The purity of Christ's life could never induce wicked men to believe Him, when He proclaimed that He was sent to show them the way of holiness, and to assure them of the future and eternal life.

Nor did Christ expect the Jews to believe Him *simply* on His word. "If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin." That is Christ's own declaration; and, surely, it is clear and plain enough.

The great evangelical thinkers and defenders of the truth of Christianity, in the last century, did

not feel themselves to be in a mist about the meaning and purpose of Christ's miracles—like the cavillers and philosophizers of our own day. They accepted the declaration of the purpose for which He wrought His miracles, from Christ Himself, and from the natural commentary passed upon them by the evangelists while they narrated the deeds they witnessed, or wrote down what the witnesses told them.

Our Saviour most plainly and positively told the Jews that His miracles were the credentials of His Messiahship. "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me." It is His own blessed declaration. Why do any of our modern philosophizers question it? I repeat, the words are plain enough: we cannot misunderstand them.

They proclaim to us that the Divine Being exacts no irrational obedience from His creatures. God did not expect the Jews to receive Christ as the promised Messiah, simply because Jesus told them that He was the Messiah. Nor did Jesus Christ expect men to receive Him as their Re-

deemer, simply because He said He was the Redeemer. The Jews were expected to believe on rational and open proof. And to such proofs the Saviour points them, and convicts them of their perversity in shutting their eyes upon the proofs.

Think of the scene in Solomon's porch, as it is described in the tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel: "Then came the Jews round about Him, and said unto Him, How long dost Thou make us to doubt?" or, as it is in the margin, "How long dost Thou hold us in suspense? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me."

What language can be plainer? You ask me if I am the Christ, the promised Messiah. I told you before that I was, and ye would not believe me. Why do you ask me to tell you again? My repeating it again would not make it more true. Look at the proof which God has given you. "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." Think again of Christ's words in His last discourses with His disciples, in the fifteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, when He is warning

them that they shall receive the same kind of evil treatment from the wicked world as He receives : " If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin ; but now they have no cloak for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin : but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father ; for he that hateth me hateth my Father also."

Give me leave to say, that the hesitancy which has been felt in some minds about Miracles, in our time, has been owing in a great degree to the injudicious peddling of some Christian writers, themselves. An affectation of philosophizing, as they call it, has sprung up among scribblers in Christian periodicals, more especially—a practice of dashing off smart little essays on this, that, and the other—suggesting that our old beliefs need modernizing in expression—that our old views need adjusting to modern ideas and theories—in other words, that we should talk, think, and believe differently from our good old Christian forefathers who were evangelical believers. In this way, I hold that considerable mischief has been done in many minds,

as it regards their belief in both the verity and value of the Miracles of Christ.

“Are the Miracles really of such importance as they have been held to be?” some of these smart scribblers have asked. “Does a miracle prove a moral truth? and how can it do so? and do you not need the morality of Christ’s doctrines to prove His miracles, rather than His miracles to prove His doctrines?”—with other shilly-shally questions that were asked by Rousseau (in his ‘*Æmilius*’), an open sceptic, one hundred years ago—and which Christian thinkers ought to know better than to ask, now-a-days. No Christian with his head set the right way on his shoulders, one would think, could ever dream that Christ’s miracles were intended to prove His doctrines; but must perceive, at once, that they were intended to prove His Divine commission and authority.

No reflecting man can wonder that Dr. Mozley gives the ‘startling answer,’ as one called it, to his own question, at the close of the following paragraph in his first Bampton Lecture:—

“If a person of evident integrity and loftiness of character rose into notice in a particular country

and community eighteen years ago, who made these communications about himself:—that he had existed before his natural birth, from all eternity, and before the world was, in a state of glory with God—that he was the only begotten son of God—that the world itself had been made by him—that he had, however, come down from heaven and assumed the form and nature of man for a particular purpose, viz., to be the lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world—that he thus stood in a mysterious and supernatural relation to the whole of mankind—that through him alone mankind had access to God—that he was the head of an invisible kingdom, into which he should gather all the generations of righteous men who had lived in the world—that on his departure from hence he should return to heaven to prepare mansions there for them—and, lastly, that he should descend again at the end of the world to judge the whole human race, on which occasion all that were in their graves should hear his voice and come forth, they that had done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that had done evil unto the resurrection of damnation—if this person made these

assertions about himself, and all that was done was to make the assertions, what would be the inevitable conclusion of sober reason respecting that person? The necessary conclusion of sober reason respecting that person would be that he was disordered in his understanding. What other decision could we come to when a man looking like one of ourselves and only exemplifying in his life and circumstances the ordinary course of nature, said this about himself, but that when reason had lost its balance, a dream of extraordinary and unearthly grandeur might be the result?"

The words that follow this paragraph, in Dr. Mozley's first Bampton Lecture, I will read to you, because they are the words of a sound reasoner; and because they corroborate what I have already maintained in your hearing:—

"By no rational being could a just and benevolent life be accepted as a proof of such astonishing announcements. Miracles are the necessary complement, then, of the truth of such announcements, which, without them, are purposeless and abortive, the unfinished fragments of a design which is nothing unless it is the whole. They are necessary to the

justification of such announcements, which, indeed, unless they are supernatural truths, are the wildest delusions. The matter and its guarantee are the two parts of a revelation, the absence of either of which neutralizes and undoes it."

There is another very serious thought that I must utter to you. And yet, I almost shrink from the task of trying to put the thought into words, lest I should be guilty of irreverence. The thought is this:—How could Christ Himself know that He was really God's appointed messenger to Man, the Redeemer, the long-foretold Saviour of the race, if He did not find Himself possessed of supernatural power? We do not know the mode of the union between the Divine and Human Natures in the person of Christ—or, how gradually the Divine Nature assured the Human Nature of that awful union, so that "the Man Christ Jesus" became, at length, fully conscious of it. But we cannot avoid the thought that Christ would, Himself, need some outward proof, as well as inward impression or intuition, of His own supernatural character and power.

His "hour was not yet come," during the Temp-

tation in the wilderness—His hour for assuming and displaying the full character of the Messiah—but it seems as if Divine intimations of the miraculous energy He was to wield in the future had commenced within Him, and that the Arch-tempter knew of it, and therefore plied Him with the sinful suggestions that He should command stones to be made bread, and cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. When He thought *His hour was come*, if He had willed supernatural acts and could not perform them, He must have shrunk from assuming the Messiahship. In the clear and sensible words of Thomas Madge (in a lecture delivered by him, in Essex Street Chapel, a few years ago)—

“If Christ had not been possessed of the power of working miracles, how was He to know that He was not labouring under some kind of self-deception or mental hallucination? How was He to satisfy Himself that He was not led away by His own intuitions, imaginings, and impulses? Such high pretensions as He had advanced would never have been put forth by Him, if He had not felt that they were supported by such manifestations of Divine power as admitted of no mistake. When

34 CHRIST'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF POWER.

He felt and saw that by the mere act of His will the sick were healed and the dead raised to life, there could be, and there was, no doubt, no misgiving, as to the reality of His divine mission. He had the simple and calm confidence of one who knew that He had received his power from on high. For His own sake, therefore, it was necessary that he should have this witness to the character which He assumed."

We conclude, then, that Miracles are probable, because God could not leave His fallen creatures, inevitably, to the fatal ruinous consequences of sin, but must provide a Redeemer for them;—and that Redeemer needed not only to produce His miraculous credentials to mankind in order to assure them of the truth of His mission—but He needed miraculous powers to be assured of the truth of it, Himself.

IV.

WHAT ANCIENT UNBELIEVERS THOUGHT ABOUT
MIRACLES. A PROBLEM FOR THE ANONYMOUS
AUTHOR OF 'SUPERNATURAL RELIGION.'

CHRISTIANITY had enemies, very early. But it is a remarkable fact that the earliest foes of Christianity did not question the reality of the Miracles of Christ.

In the second century, Celsus, a physician, wrote a book against Christianity; but we learn from Origen, who replied to his treatise, that Celsus threw no discredit on the fact of Christ's miracles. In the third century, Porphyry, a Platonic philosopher, and a man of considerable powers of mind, wrote a book against Christianity; but the fragments of his work, preserved by Eusebius and Jerome, shew that he did not deny the reality of Christ's miracles. In the fourth century, the Emperor Julian wrote a book against Christianity :

his reasonings are preserved by Cyril ; but neither did he call the miracles of Christ in question.

“ How was it, then,” you will ask, “ that these men, whom you call enemies of Christianity, granted the reality of the miracles of Christ, and yet they did not acknowledge Him to be the Saviour—the Redeemer of mankind ? ”

The answer is—that they said Christ performed His miracles by Magic. If any one were to tell us so, in our day, some of us might be inclined to give the reply which used to be given by old sailors, on board ‘ Men of War,’ when any one told them an incredible story :—“ Tell that to the Marines.”

“ But, what did they mean by Magic, and the performance of miracles by Magic ? ” you will ask again.

Let me, first, observe that there was no Science, fitly and deservedly so called, in ancient times. What we call the ancient Astronomy, the old Ptolemaic System, was, you know, a huge collection of blunders. Geography was so imperfect it was not worthy of the name ; while Chemistry, Geology, Optics, and a score of other important branches of knowledge were either entirely or comparatively

unknown to the ancient Greeks and Romans, and to later European people. The men who were called philosophers, in ancient times, held that the Universe is composed of Four Elements—Fire, Air, Earth, and Water. And some of the philosophers held that there are Dæmons, or Spirits, who have command over these elements: Spirits of the Fire, Spirits of the Air, Spirits of the Earth, and Spirits of the Sea, or Water.

Now, the men who were called Magicians asserted that they held communication with these Spirits, and received power from them to perform deeds which men, by their merely natural powers, could not perform; and to bring about purposes which men could not accomplish by their natural intelligence or strength. These so-called Magicians gave it out that they had to proceed to some lonely spot—some wild wood, or deserted heath—in the night, and either under an eclipse of the moon, or during some particular configuration of the planets. That they had to make a magical circle on the ground, shed the blood of certain small animals within it, and then write magical names on the ground, also within the circle:—Tetragrammaton,

Schidbarshemath-Selthan, Malchabeth-arsirin-heberuah-Schehakim, and other strange associations of syllables you will not care to hear. That, then, they had to utter 'incantations,' or words of such magical power, that the Spirits would most surely respond to them by appearing to the Magician in a visible form. One Spirit, they said, usually appeared in the form of a black horse, another in the form of a bear, another like an eagle, another like a lion, and so on.

Undoubtedly, all this was false representation on the part of the Magicians. No deeds of this kind ever occurred. Yet, from the credulous and superstitious, the Magicians gained gold by their profession. Foolish men, ambitious men, wicked men, gave them money for their pretended aid, brought about by spirits, in the accomplishment of their evil or silly purposes.

The belief in dealing with dæmons, or spirits, was largely spread over the ancient world. Thus, the Pharisees said of Christ—"He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils." And so it was that the Pagan philosophers of old said that Christ wrought His miracles by magic.

Such a saying has no meaning for us, in our time, save to remind us of ancient follies.

I must not omit to tell you that a writer in our own day—the author of the new book, entitled “Supernatural Religion”—the book which has excited so much attention, and which is deemed, by some, to be the most complete and triumphant refutation of the Truth of Christianity ever published—I say, the anonymous author of this book maintains that the first followers of Christ undoubtedly shared, with their contemporaries, the prevalent belief in magic, the common slavery to superstition,—and that, therefore, their low, ignorant, and grovelling character renders their recital of Christ's miracles unworthy of the regard and belief of people living in this enlightened nineteenth century.

It seems to me to be an overwhelming reply to this charge of unworthiness in the Gospel records, to remind this anonymous author that the elevated character of the miracles attributed to the Saviour, and, still more, Christ's own elevated character, remove these records entirely out of the region of

ignorant, low, unreasoning superstition. Let it be remembered that the 'signs and wonders and mighty deeds' related of Jesus, are not mere foolish facts of strangeness to make men stare. They are deeds of mercy and beneficence, as well as of power—deeds worthy of the Divine Being—deeds performed with a grand, definite purpose—a purpose worthy of God.

But the greatest difficulty remains for the author of 'Supernatural Religion.' If the Evangelists were poor, low, credulous, and unreasoning creatures, how is it that they soar above all other writers, in drawing a portrait of such moral perfection, beauty, and dignity, as that of their Master? If the Gospel writers have left us only silly romances in their accounts of the miracles of Christ, how came they to conceive, how could they create, such a picture of personal excellence as that of Him who, they say, performed these miracles?

This difficulty has been so nobly expressed and presented by Prebendary Row, in his solid treatise on "The Supernatural in the New Testament," that I will quote his words at length:—

"Whatever opinions may be formed as to the unhistorical character of the Gospels, there is one fact respecting them, as to which believers and unbelievers must alike agree, namely, that they contain a delineation of the most perfect conception ever formed by the mind of man—the character of Jesus Christ. There it is, beyond the power of contradiction. The overwhelming majority of men possessed of the most powerful minds have recognised it as the greatest of ideals—as well as the millions of ordinary men to whom it has been the object of supreme admiration and attraction. The following questions respecting it therefore urgently demand an answer :—

"If the Gospels are a mere collection of mythic and legendary stories, generated and put together in the manner affirmed by those who deny their historical character, how got this great character of Christ there? If the fables of which these Gospels are said to be composed are the inventions of many minds, whence the unity of Christ's character? If their inventors were only credulous enthusiasts and fanatics, whence its perfection? If they were implicated in all the superstitions of the age,

whence its moral elevation? Of what order of thought then existing is Christ's character the embodiment? How could the credulity which is necessary for the acceptance of superstitious fictions, or how could the spirit which invented them, have conceived these moral elements?

"There the character is. Let us be distinctly informed how it was put together. How much of it is fact, and how much of it is fiction. How the fictions were welded together with the facts, so as to compose the whole ; and what class or order of minds in the early Church was equal to its elaboration. This delineation must have been made at an early period, and could not have been a late invention ; for it is, substantially, the same as that contained in those Epistles of St. Paul, which are acknowledged to have been written within thirty years of the date of the Crucifixion.

"A distinct answer to these questions is demanded of those who affirm that the Gospels have no value as histories. It is impossible to deny that they have a most important bearing on the present question. *Why do not unbelievers set themselves to grapple with this problem?*"

V.

A GLANCE AT THE OLD ENGLISH FREETHINKERS :
THOMAS WOOLSTON'S ATTACK ON THE MIRACLES.

LEAVING the ancient opposers of Christianity who did not deny the reality of Christ's Miracles, let us come to the 'Old English Free-thinkers,' as they are called :—Lord Herbert of Cherbury ; strong-headed Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury ; the politely sceptical Earl of Shaftesbury, author of the famous 'Characteristics ;' Charles Blount, author of 'The Oracle of Reason ;' Toland, the erratic genius who wrote many curious books, and a 'Life of Milton' which reads 'as dry as a stick,' to use an old-fashioned saying ; Anthony Collins, the friend of Locke, and a man of established uprightness of character ; Thomas Woolston ; Dr. Matthew Tindal, author of 'Christianity as Old as the Creation ;' Dr. Morgan ; and Chubb of Salisbury.

All these authors, more or less, disparage the Miracles of Christ ; but the greater number of them treat the subject in a covert way. They affect to be moved by a sincere admiration of *real* Christianity, and entreat their readers to assist them in removing the improbable and the absurd, so that men of reason might remain attached to religion. The disguise was too transparent, and many even of their own adherents despised them for it. Many of their books are now forgotten, though the list of their names is often renewed in print.

The list seems long ; but it is not exhausted. The grand historian, Gibbon, properly belongs to it ; and, I fear, Dr. Middleton, the clever churchman, cannot truthfully be excluded from it. But, two more powerful advocates of scepticism than all the rest have to be added to it : the subtle-minded David Hume ; and that great politician of adverse fortunes, the celebrated Lord Bolingbroke,—who, however, did not fully announce his sceptical views to the world during his lifetime—but left a sum of money to David Mallet, to edit his works, after his death :—a deed, you will remember, which occasioned that characteristic saying of Dr. Johnson which

Boswell has chronicled for us—"Sir, he was a scoundrel and a coward : a scoundrel for charging a blunderbuss against religion and morality ; a coward because he had no resolution to fire it off himself, but left half-a-crown to a beggarly Scotchman to draw the trigger after his death."

How far these—some of whom were men of considerable intellectual power—were successful in their active and subtle and persevering attacks upon the religion of Christ, may be gathered from a few very notable words in the 'Advertisement' prefixed by Bishop Butler to his 'Analogy : '—

"It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of enquiry ; but that it is now, at length, discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it, as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment ; and nothing remained, but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world."

English Society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—English Society, both thinking

and thoughtless—was evidently shaken, by the numerous and persevering attacks of Freethinkers upon both Natural and Revealed Religion. In their great work of duty—the work of replying to these attacks—Christian Ministers and Christian scholars were not deficient. The ‘Analogy’ of Bishop Butler is, perhaps, the most irrefragable and triumphant defence of religious truth ever written ; and the labours of Bentley, and Samuel Clarke, and Boyle, and Stillingfleet, and Locke, and Leslie, and Chandler, and Hugh Farmer, and Campbell, and Gilbert West, and Lord Lyttelton, and Lardner, and Leland, and Ray, and Derham, and Smallbrook, and Sherlock, and Bishop Watson, and Paley, and many other earnest men, form a library of ‘Apologetics’—to use the old word of the Fathers—that is to say, of books written in defence of Christian Truth—that may most truly be deemed invaluable.

These able and laborious men did not write in vain : English society lost its avowed sceptical tendency under the influence of their efforts. Let me earnestly recommend young working men to read their books, which take up all the objections

to Miracles current in their times, and which fully answer those objections.

Of all the Freethinking writers I have named, the most active and industrious assailant of the truth of the Christian Miracles was Thomas Woolston. He was a Cambridge scholar, and a Bachelor of Divinity ; and could quote the Greek and Latin Fathers with seeming facility. In his youth, he wrote a treatise on the Allegorical Interpretations of the Fathers. If he had done nothing more, he would have done no harm. But, as years went on, he joined the band of Deists, and boldly proclaimed that the records of Christ's Miracles, in the Four Gospels, were to be read and interpreted merely as so many allegorical treatises. But he did not stop there : at length he openly treated the Miracles with ridicule, scoffed at Christ, and spoke of His deeds as mere juggles, descending to language so low and scurrilous that no one would think of imitating it, now-a-days.

It was this scurrility and offensiveness of his language to the minds of Christian people—far more than any danger to Truth which they feared from his coarse reasonings—that moved a number

of wrong-headed, though they might be right-hearted, people to bring Thomas Woolston before a legal tribunal. The jury gave a verdict against him, and he was fined. He could not pay the money, so he was sent to prison; and he *died* in prison. It was wrong to send him thither. It was wrong to bring him before magistrates and lawyers. It was enough that Bishop Smallbrook answered him, and answered him *well*; and that, perhaps, one hundred other persons wrote replies to him—good, bad, and indifferent.

VI.

DAVID HUME, AND THE GREAT CONTROVERSY
GATHERED AROUND HIS NAME.

HAVE said that of all the Freethinking writers of the last century, Thomas Woolston was the most active and industrious assailant of the Miracles of Christ. But, the 'Essay on Miracles,' by David Hume, which was written some years later than the 'Discourses' of Woolston, is held by sceptics to be the heaviest and most fatal blow ever dealt against Miracles, by the hand of unbelief. When I disputed with London sceptics, in 1857, their cry, again and again, was 'Answer Hume's Argument against the Miracles!' They seemed to think his argument *unanswerable*.

It would not be easy to point to a stronger understanding than that of David Hume. His reasonings, almost always, shew an extraordinary degree of subtlety. You cannot banish the consciousness, while you are reading him, that you

are dealing with a mind of singular penetration and keenness. I—for one—can never speak of great intellects without a degree of reverence—I had almost said, of homage. I could not speak lightly of what I felt sure was a fault, in Shakspeare or Milton, in Bacon or Newton. And I should feel no inclination to listen to any one who told me he could shew me their faults. Such is the homage I cannot choose but feel for high genius and intelligence. You will not expect me, therefore, to speak disparagingly of a mind like that of David Hume.

But, a close study of the minds of Freethinkers has taught me that they have a tendency to grow in love with their freethinking. Some of you may think this strange ; for as doubt is but darkness, there can be no happiness in it, you may say. Yet there is something that flatters human pride and self-love, in the consciousness that you do not think like other people—above all, that you rise above the superstitious thinkings of other people. And the more this thought is indulged by the Freethinker, the more readily and eagerly he clings to any discovery—or what he thinks a discovery—

that strengthens his confidence in doubt or disbelief. He comes to delight so much in these fancied discoveries that, at length, he becomes self-blinded to the fallacy there is in them. I judge—but I do so timidly—that this was the case with David Hume: that he was self-blinded to his own fallacy, through mere fondness for his own system of doubt—because it was his own.

“A miracle,” he says, “is a violation of the laws of Nature; and, as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. For, as there is no such uniform experience of the truth of human testimony, as there is of the uniformity of the laws of nature, the one experience must always be stronger than the other; and no testimony, therefore, *can ever render a miracle probable.*”

In a shorter form, he took the same position in some editions of his “Essay”—“No testimony for any kind of miracles *can ever possibly amount* to a probability, much less to a proof.” But Hume afterwards shaped his position more cautiously:

instead of *can ever possibly amount*, he worded it thus, "*has ever amounted*." Hume felt he must make this alteration to escape self-contradiction, for, in the second part of his "Essay on Miracles" he has this passage :

"I own there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit a proof from human testimony—though, perhaps, it will be impossible to find any such in all the records of history. Suppose all the authors, in all languages, agree, that from the first of January, 1600, there was a total darkness over all the earth for eight days ; suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people ; that all travellers who return from foreign countries bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction ; it is evident, that our present philosophers, instead of doubting of that fact, ought to receive it for certainty, and ought to search for the causes whence it must be derived."

Hume thus admits the *possibility* of a miracle, and yet he terms a miracle an "*absolute impossibility*"! One cannot help feeling astonishment

that such an acute and subtle reasoner should so strangely commit himself. It seems wonderful that Hume himself did not see his own self-contradiction : Hume, who could think so shrewdly : Hume, who could write the best English prose of his own time. Not "Saxon," as we call it—not Will Cobbett English—but fine, clear, scholarly, polished English, unencumbered with the ponderous Latinisms of Dr. Johnson, the stately mannerisms of Gibbon, or the over-swelling pomp of Robertson. The keen, clear, acute, and polished writing of Hume constitutes a proof, in itself, of his cleverness as a thinker ; for no man can ever write clearly who does not think clearly.

But, passing away from his singular slip of self-contradiction, the boasted " argument of Hume," as sceptics call it, is really no argument at all. No testimony, he says, can ever render the account of a miracle true, for *experience* teaches us—mark the word *experience*—it teaches us, he maintains, that the laws of Nature are unalterable.

Experience teaches us ! But *what* experience ? A miracle was contrary to David Hume's experience. But his experience was confined to what he

saw, felt, touched, and so on. His experience was confined to his own life, and to the small space around him. He had no experience of what occurred before he was born : he had no experience of what occurred in parts of the earth which he never visited. Yet, he learned a good deal of what occurred before he was born : he learned a good deal of what has occurred in parts of the world he never visited. How? By human testimony. Past history to David Hume was what it is to us all—*not* experience, but testimony.

Experience has shewn us that the laws of Nature are unalterable, says Hume. But experience cannot have shewn us this in the Past—for we could not experience anything before we were born. If we know anything about the Past, it is by testimony. But testimony does *not* shew us that what Hume calls "the Laws of Nature" have always been unalterable—for testimony tells about Miracles. Testimony does *not* assure us that there have been no Miracles, in the world, at any time—for testimony assures us that Jesus Christ performed miracles, in His time, in Jerusalem, and other parts of Palestine.

What David Hume called experience was testimony—and he did not see it! and so he failed—with all his acuteness—to see that his “argument” was no argument at all!

I would not have you suppose that this is any discovery of mine. When London sceptics challenged me, so vehemently, in 1857, to answer what they called “Hume’s *un*answerable argument against the Miracles,” I found—on making enquiry as to how Hume’s contemporaries had dealt with him, that Dr. Campbell has fully disposed of Hume’s fallacies in the very way that I have pointed out to you. I learned more: I learned that Campbell’s manuscript had been shewn to Hume before it was published; and the only reason he gave for not replying to Campbell was, that he had made a “fixed resolution, in the beginning of life,” not to reply to any of his adversaries. I think you will agree with me that Hume’s “fixed resolution” was unworthy of a man of intelligence and candour.

Paley, as you know, replies to Hume, in his “Evidences of Christianity;” and many have written replies since Paley’s time. Yet, ever and anon, Hume’s so-called argument has been re-asserted by

sceptics. Since the exposure of its fallacy by John Stuart Mill—himself a disbeliever in God's existence—partisans of the sceptical school have placed less confidence in Hume's position. But lo ! the anonymous author of "Supernatural Religion" now maintains that Hume's position has never been shaken, and charges Christian writers with *evasion* in their treatment of Hume. But why has this author *evaded* the complete dissection and destruction of Hume's argument by Mr. Warrington ? asks that very able writer on the Christian Evidences, Prebendary Row.

I cannot possibly give you an account of all that has been said in these controversies ; but I feel sure that the more you consider and weigh over all that has been written on each side, the more settled will be your conviction that no argument—even from the highest human mind, or battalion of minds, can prove Miracles impossible—to *the Theist*. If a man be an Atheist, you cannot reason with him, in defence of Miracles—for he denies your standing-ground, at the outset.

Let me, however, rehearse in your hearing some of the observations that have been made in these

prolonged controversies. The very phrase, "*contrary* to experience," used by Hume, is most evidently faulty. A fact may be a fact, and yet neither we nor any of our neighbours have ever experienced it: it is not true to say it is *contrary* to our experience; it is, simply, something we have not experienced, and we should not be right to say it was impossible that there could be such a fact. A person living "under the Line," as sailors say, where the days and nights are equal, may say it is contrary to experience that the sun should rise at three in the morning, and set at nine at night: but he would not be right to say so; the simple truth is that it is not within the compass or scope of *his* experience. Herodotus relates the account given by the Phœnicians of their voyage round Africa, but tells us that he does not believe it, because they said they saw the sun just in the contrary direction to that in which it is seen in Greece: it was contrary to experience. But we moderns feel sure, from the manner of their relation, that the enterprising voyagers passed round the Cape of Good Hope, and that their narrative is true. It was a fact, simply, without the compass of the experience

of Herodotus and the people north of the equator.

Mankind are continually having new experiences, as the ages roll on. Suppose the people of William the Conqueror's time had said it was certain that men would never be able to transmit a message across the Atlantic in a few minutes, for it was contrary to experience, and therefore impossible—the telegraph assures us that they would have been wrong, and all they ought to have said was that it was without the compass of their experience, and they did not see the possibility of it. Englishmen of the age of the Norman Conquest might also have said it was utterly impossible that any human being could live an hour several feet under water, for it was contrary to experience; but the diving bell enables *us* to say it is *not* impossible: the fact was, simply, without the compass of men's experience so many years ago.

Hume was a philosopher, and, unfortunately, he talks as if all men were philosophers. He speaks of a precise and deliberate balancing and weighing of present testimony against what he calls "experience" (forgetting it is only past testimony) as going

on in the minds of men, commonly. But our minds, commonly, are not so employed. However improbable a fact may seem, if I know the man who tells me that he witnessed it to be "as true as steel, and to have an eye like a hawk," as we say—if I believe that he never lies, that his eyesight is bright, and his observation of things is clear and unerring—the improbable becomes probable while I listen to him, and very quickly, too.

Above all, it is possible that there may be some peculiar quality of probability in a relation given to us, which completely obscures and annihilates all the crowd of improbabilities which, otherwise, surround the story. Suppose we hear of a deed of what thousands of people call incredible generosity—if we, ourselves, have intimate knowledge of the perfect goodness of the person who is said to have performed the deed, it will not be incredible to us. Some may tell us of the marks of untruth they believe they have detected in the story, and others may cynically pronounce the performance of the deed to be utterly unlike human nature—but we shall say that the deed is like the man who is said to have done it, and we believe it.

Let the controversies raised by Hume thus conduct us back to the ever-blessed fact that "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." God gave His Son, and His Son controlled the order of Nature in proof of His Divine mission. Philosophers may tell us about "uniformity of experience" and "inexorable laws of Nature." We point to the whole procedure of God's condescension and love and wisdom and power ; and reply to philosophers, that we believe it—*for it is like Him !*

VII.

WHAT SCEPTICS HOLD TO BE THEIR STRONGEST POSITION, IN REJECTING CHRIST'S MIRACLES.

"YOU seem to have forgot, all along," says some sceptical friend who has been listening to me, "that the Bible ascribes miracles to the devil, as well as to God. Do you not perceive that this renders all you have said, and all others may say, in defence and maintenance of the verity and value of Christ's Miracles, utterly worthless?"

I declare to you, without one moment's hesitation, that if I believed the Author of Evil has the power to work Miracles, I must give up lecturing in defence of the Miracles of Christ as proofs of His Divine mission, altogether.

Nothing surprised me less, when I opened the new treatise entitled "Supernatural Religion," than to find the author put this forth as one of his earliest and strongest arguments.

"The first thought," says he, "which must occur

to any unprejudiced mind is amazement, that an Almighty God should select, as a guarantee of His supposed communications, signs and wonders which can be so easily imitated by others, that there must always be a doubt whether the message be from the kingdom of heaven, or from the kingdom of lies. It seems *à priori* absolutely incredible that a Divine revelation which is so important, and which it is intended that man should believe, should be made in such obscure language, and with such doubtful attestation. That heaven should condescend to use the same arguments as hell, and with so little difference in the degree of the power exhibited, that man can scarcely, if at all, discriminate between them, is a theory of the most startling description."

This anonymous author expresses himself still more strongly: "Does not the necessity of this theory of false miracles, of the power of God thus placed on a level with the power of Satan, in a matter where the distinct purpose is to authenticate by miraculous testimony a miraculous revelation, rather betray the unreality of miracles altogether, and indicate that the idea of such supernatural

intervention originates solely from the superstitious ignorance of men in ages when every phase of nature was attributed to direct supernatural interference, and was ascribed with arbitrary promptness to God or to the devil? It is certain that as Miracles are represented as being common to God and Satan, they cannot be considered as a distinctive attestation of a Divine revelation."

In his second volume the author boldly asserts that "Even if the reality of Miracles could be substantiated, their value as evidence for the Divine revelation is destroyed by the necessary admission that Miracles are not limited to one source, but that there are Miracles Satanic which are to be *dis*-believed, as well as Divine and evidential." And, on the next page but one, he has this definitive sentence: "Ignorance and superstition created Miracles; knowledge has for ever annihilated them."

I confess to you that although I read this bold language with sorrow, I read it without surprise. When I used to read the words of the great Samuel Clarke, the friend of Newton, and the reasonings of other great divines of the Church of England,

in the days of my youth, with all my worship and admiration for them, their belief in Satanic and demoniacal Miracles staggered me. I did not wonder that some of the Fathers—as Tertullian, Origen, and Jerome—maintained this belief; for they, like most men of ancient times, were tinctured with the common belief in magic, or the communication to men of supernatural powers by demons or spirits. But I conned over the pages of several standard divines without being able to accord with them, or admire their logic, and often with wonder.

Some of them seemed, now and then, to see the truth in a clear light. “You could not know that I came from, and was sent by such a prince,” says Bishop Fleetwood, in his “Essay on Miracles,” “by my bringing his seal along with me, if other people had the same seal, and would lend it to others to use as they saw fit.” Yet, even this learned bishop, not to mention others, is not always consistent with himself.

Hugh Farmer was the reasoner who carried me with him, in those days of eager reading that I remember with delight. He did not rank with the *most* orthodox writers; but his thinkings on the

question of Miracles seemed to me very sound thinkings, and they seem so still. It is now a little more than one hundred years since his "Dissertation on Miracles" was published. There is a mass of mingled learning and logic in it which would be passed over, unceremoniously, by the hop-skip-and-jump readers of our day; but the solidity and truth of the great argument of the book, I humbly think, are impregnable.

Farmer maintains that "Miracles are the peculiar works of God, or such as can never be effected without *a Divine interposition*;" and that "whether God works the Miracles Himself alone, or whether He enables and commissions others to work them, there is equally *a Divine interposition*." And he argues that "in either case every purpose of religion will be secured—for, whatever God authorizes and empowers another to do, is, in effect, done by God, and is as manifestly a declaration of His will, as what He does immediately Himself. He can no more authorize another to act, than He can act, Himself, in opposition to His own nature, or in confirmation of imposture."

Farmer first shews that we have no proof what-

ever that spiritual beings have any power of moving matter ; and that, if they have no such power, they cannot perform Miracles. And he shrewdly brings to his aid the venerated Dr. Isaac Watts, who, in his “ Philosophical Essays,” powerfully reasons that no created spirit has any innate power to move matter ; that, being void of solidity, they cannot move matter by *impulse*, because there can be no contact ; and that—without a Divine commission—they cannot excite motion in bodies by *volition*, there being no natural connexion between their volition and the motion of material beings. The human spirit, Watts observes, by all its volitions, can only move those particular parts of the body which God has subjected to voluntary motion, and for which proper muscles are provided, together with the nervous powers which are necessary to move those muscular parts. Farmer adopts the doctor’s reasoning, and denies that any created spirit has any innate power to operate upon matter and work miracles.

A second point in his argument is maintained by Farmer with great force and clearness : That the stability, steadiness, and permanency of the course

of nature are our highest proofs of God's power, wisdom, and goodness,—and that these proofs would be destroyed if any of God's creatures could alter the course of nature at their will—for some of them might bring the utmost perplexity and misery to God's moral and intelligent creation, and it would seem then that He had resigned the reins of government over His own universe.

His reasonings in support of the third point in his argument, occupy two-thirds of Farmer's "Dissertation:" that point consists of "Arguments from *Revelation* to prove that Miracles are, in themselves, certain evidences of a *Divine interposition*."

"*Arguments from Revelation!*" You will see, at once, that, however positive the anonymous author of "Supernatural Religion" may be that Miracles are represented (in the Bible) as being common to God and Satan—this solid thinker and man of learning means utterly to deny that Miracles are so represented in the Bible, or he would not undertake to give us "*Arguments from Revelation*."

In the compass of two hundred and sixty pages of rich scholarship and clear reasoning, he disposes

of all sorts of objections of a minor description, and then comes to the three crucial cases :—The Magicians of Egypt, the Witch of Endor, and our Lord's Temptation in the Wilderness.

We will reserve all discussion respecting Christ's Temptation in the Wilderness, until we get farther on. And we need not give many moments to the consideration of the case of the Witch of Endor, after the wordy and almost innumerable books or tracts that have been written upon it. The old belief in witchcraft has passed away—in spite of the great names that might be mentioned as believers in it ; and no one believes *now* that a witch can cause the *dévil* to counterfeit the souls of the dead, so that an evil spirit appeared before Saul in the likeness of Samuel. We may all adopt the most general conclusion of modern criticism :—that the Witch of Endor was an impostor, and therefore was affrighted when she saw Samuel, who miraculously appeared to Saul—not by her power, but by God's own appointment.

Let us consider, more fully, for ourselves, whether the Scripture narrative authorizes us to believe that *the Magicians of Egypt performed Miracles.*

VIII.

DID THE MAGICIANS OF EGYPT PERFORM MIRACLES
BY SATANIC AID ?

I REMEMBER that I am addressing many who believe the miraculous narrative in Exodus ; but I am in the presence of some who will say, “ We do not believe that any miracles were wrought at all. You need not trouble yourself to prove that the Magicians performed no miracles by the aid of the devil. We are not dotards. We see no cause to believe that any of the ‘ ten plagues ’ were miracles.”

Yet, the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery has been commemorated for ages—the separate and peculiar existence of the Jews is known to us all—and the history, as recorded in the Book of Exodus, is so striking an instance of the reality of God’s moral government in the world, that I know nothing in history better worth

believing—if we feel that the existence of an Almighty Moral Governor is of any worth to us.

Besides, I wish to enable those who hear me to see how easy it is, by paying strict attention to the Scripture narrative, and reading it naturally—as we read other books—to clear out of our way what Bishop Colenso and others have so boldly stated to be inexplicable difficulties and impossible relations.

Let us, therefore, look fully and fairly at the Scripture history of the “Plagues of Egypt,” and of the deliverance of the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage. I want you all to look at what I conceive to be the real meaning and purpose of the history. I feel sure that that will not only be the best means of convincing yourselves that the Magicians were not assisted by Satanic power, and that all they did was to play the part of low, paltry dissemblers and jugglers—but that some reflection on the history of the deliverance from bondage of the children of Israel will be of solid value to us all, as creatures amenable, ourselves, to the moral government of God.

Turn to your Bibles, and read, in the third chapter of Exodus, how Moses beholds the burning bush,

hears the awful voice of God, and is told to put off his shoes, for the place on which he stands is holy ground. Moses hides his face, and God declares that He has seen the affliction of His people, and will send Moses to bring them forth out of Egypt. "Who am I," says Moses, "that I should go unto Pharaoh, and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? and when I am come unto them, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say unto me; What is His name? what shall I say unto them?" And when God has declared His Name to be "I AM"—the name indicating that none has sole, underived, necessary existence but Himself—Moses is directed to go and gather the Elders of Israel together, and declare to them how God has determined to deliver His people.

Moses still refuses and hesitates, and is then commanded to cast down his rod, and it becomes a serpent, and again becomes a rod—to put his hand into his bosom, and it becomes leprous, and again it is restored. Moses is then told that if neither of these signs convince the Elders, he is to take of the water of the river—the

Nile—and pour it on the ground, and it shall become blood. Aaron meets Moses, by God's direction, and Aaron learns how the Almighty has appeared to his brother; and, together, they go and gather all the Elders of the children of Israel together.

It would seem that the heads of the tribes lived in some degree of state and honour during the period of bondage. Most likely they exercised a sort of limited magistracy over their own people. It would hardly have been possible to keep so many millions of people in a state of slavery, unless certain political expedients had been used by the Egyptians. The "Elders" would thus have great importance in the eyes of the tribes, and would be an unquestionable authority in their decisions.

The words in which the behaviour of the Elders is related are so important that I quote them literally: "And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the Elders of the children of Israel: and Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children

of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped."

The first great necessary step in the enterprise God has committed to Moses is now accomplished. He is received by the Elders—the heads of the tribes of Israel. They *believe* the signs displayed before them to be God's seal that the mission of Moses is true. They hear the account of God's condescension and goodness, and they gratefully *bow their heads and worship*. They acknowledge that they have witnessed God's power, and they accept Moses and Aaron as God's appointed leaders of their long-expected deliverance.

And now it is easy to see what would naturally follow. The Elders would solemnly and authoritatively announce the good news to the people, and bid them prepare for leaving the land of bondage. The people would circulate the good news—the hearts of the millions of captives would be filled with the inspiration of hope and the exultation of confidence; nor would they be able to restrain themselves; the Egyptians would soon learn how confidently their captives expected speedy deli-

verance. By degrees, every item of the foundation of their hopes would be detailed by the Israelites to the Egyptians: the appearance of God in the burning bush—the command given to Moses—the miracles displayed before the Elders—the rod turned into a serpent—the leprous hand—the Nile-water become blood on the dry ground—all the sources of their confidence that God was about to deliver them would soon be openly and exultingly related to the Egyptians. The effect, too, which their hopes were beginning to produce among the captives would soon excite serious attention—for some of the Israelites seem to have refused to work.

Thus, not only the general information about the hopes of his captives, but a description of the first two miracles, afterwards exhibited before Pharaoh, would have been given to him before he beheld them, and he would undoubtedly be expecting to see them. And not only Pharaoh himself, but the Magicians would hear the description of these two miracles, would also be expecting that they would be repeated in the presence of Pharaoh, and would thus be fully prepared beforehand to play their part.

Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh, and ask permission to go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the God of Israel, lest He should punish them for their long neglect of His worship. Pharaoh refuses, and orders the slavery of the Israelites to be rendered more intolerable ; and the people complain, and grow discontented with Moses.

Then follows the first miracle. Mark, strictly and exactly, the language in which it is related : " Aaron cast down his rod *before Pharaoh, and before all his servants*, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers : now the magicians of Egypt they also did *in like manner with their enchantments* ; for they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents : but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods."

And now listen to this extract from "Sharpe's History of Egypt,"—a work of acknowledged learning and ability, lately published :—

" Already had the wise men of Egypt added the vain studies of sorcery and magic to that knowledge of the physical sciences ; and they made use of juggling tricks to strengthen that power over the

minds of their countrymen which they gained from a real superiority of knowledge. When they opposed Moses before Pharaoh, whatever miracles he worked, they attempted to work, and in some cases with an apparent success. Like him they threw down their rods upon the ground, which then crawled about like serpents ; and when they took them up in their hands, they again became straight rods. And at the present day, after 3,000 years, their successors are still performing the same curious trick. The Egyptian juggler takes up in his hand the *Naja*, a small viper, and pressing a finger on the nape of its neck, puts it into a catalepsy, which makes it motionless and stiff, like a rod ; and when it regains its power of motion, the cheated bystanders fancy that the magician's rod has been changed into a serpent. The Egyptian wizards and magicians had great and mischievous power over the nation's mind ; they spoke as with a voice from heaven, which even two thousand years later the law hardly ventured to check : the utmost that the Egyptian law attempted was to punish those who consulted them. But the Jewish law called upon the mob to punish their own deceivers, and ordered them to

stone to death anybody that practised magic or divination."

The second Miracle was that of smiting the waters of the Nile, *in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of all his servants*, with the rod; and all the waters in the river were turned to blood, and the fish stank," etc. Then we read, "And the magicians *did so with their enchantments*."

The third Miracle was that of stretching forth Aaron's rod over the waters of Egypt, and covering the land, and filling the houses, bed-chambers, ovens, and kneading-troughs of the Egyptians with frogs. Then we read, "And the magicians *did so with their enchantments*, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt."

The fourth Miracle was that of stretching out the rod and smiting the dust of the earth,—“and it became lice in man and in beast: all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.” Then we read, “And the magicians *did so with their enchantments* to bring forth lice, *but they could not*: so there were lice upon man and beast.”

A pretty end of their miracle-working! “*They*

could not." And the lice remained upon the very magicians themselves, and they could not get quit of them! Satanic power! Let not the devil be charged with any such lame transactions as these of the Egyptian sorcerers—whose very name really means *jugglers*. "Did so with their juggleries"—"did in like manner"—seemed to imitate Moses and Aaron by waving their rods, perhaps. Observe that they never tried to counteract any of the plagues—to restore the Nile to its pure state, or to cleanse the land of frogs. They did not attempt it, because they knew their own helplessness. If they could create serpents out of rods, really change water into blood, and create millions of frogs—who should say what they could not do? and when and how are we to know when God works?

We read (Exodus vii. 24) that "All the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink." And so the Magicians would dig; and then, by their sleight of hand, pretend to change the water into blood—of which there was plenty, without digging for it, close by. A like juggle would make it appear that they had created frogs—of which countless numbers were at hand,

and could be easily secreted, and as easily used for their juggling purposes.

Pharaoh would not wish to be convinced by Moses and Aaron : he was sure to be on the side of the jugglers, and so their work would be easy. The sorcerers were not sent for till after the rod of Moses had been turned into a serpent. Notice of the first two plagues had been publicly given before Moses or Aaron had used the rod. So the jugglers had time to prepare. But when the fourth Miracle was wrought, they were nonplussed ! They had not time to prepare a juggle—they *did so, and could not !* We do not read that they tried to work more miracles after this failure. Yet it would seem that although they had acknowledged themselves beaten, and had said, "This is the finger of God," they affected to keep a bold front for some time, and, doubtless, thus strengthened Pharaoh in his hardness—until the plague of boils was inflicted upon the Egyptians, when we learn that "the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boil : for the boil was upon the magicians."

It is so common, both with ancient and modern writers, to describe a thing as being done, when it

only seems to be done—to describe the apparent in the same terms as the real—that the terms of the narrative, as to what the Magicians did, form no difficulty to me, and I cannot think they will to many others. The Magicians wielded no miraculous power by the influence of the devil: that they were under his influence, very largely, some of us will not doubt; but not many of us, I calculate, will be disposed to differ from Hugh Farmer, and declare we see no proof *in Revelation*, thus far, that Miracles are common to God and the devil.

But do not let us imagine, after all, that the controversy is at an end. The faulty reasonings that Farmer overthrew one hundred years ago, among the great Church divines of that period, are perpetuated by Archbishop Trench and others of his order. The “Notes on the Miracles of our Lord,” by the Archbishop of Dublin, are now in their tenth edition—a proof that the prelate’s opinions are received as correct, by many readers. And he *affirms* that the Egyptian magicians wrought their enchantments by the aid “of him who is ever the ape of the Most High; who has still his caricatures of the holiest; and who knows that in

no way can he so realize his character of Satan, or 'the Hinderer,' as by offering that which shall either be accepted instead of the true, or, being discovered to be false, shall bring the true into like discredit with itself."

I wish to say nothing disrespectful of the Archbishop—although an old prisoner for "conspiracy and sedition" cannot be expected to feel any more worship than Milton felt for arch-prelates. But I must state that I have read the third chapter of the Preliminary Essay to his book, in which he makes this affirmation, until it reads to me like "confusion worse confounded." I cannot help wishing that the ghost of Whately, the Archbishop's predecessor, may visit him in one of his midnight studies, and give him a lesson in logic—for I'm sure he needs it.

A far greater man as a theologian—though no arch-prelate—wrote a little book when he was seventy years old, in which he shews, with all the argumentative power and clearness of his youth, that no miracles were performed by the Egyptian magicians; but that they were simply low jugglers and dissemblers. I allude to Dr. Ralph Wardlaw.

He maintains Hugh Farmer's position without mincing or hesitation. His little book "On Miracles" is cheap ; and you working men who feel a further interest in this question may easily obtain it.

I wish I had time to treat fully of the real worth of Scripture history respecting the deliverance of the Israelites, and how free it is from the contradictions and impossible statements which Colenso endeavoured to shew there were in it. You have already seen, for instance, how mistaken he is in representing the order of God for the Israelites to leave Egypt as being given so suddenly that there was no time to prepare for their journey. The preparation would be begun when the Elders related to the people what Moses and Aaron had declared to them : the preparation would be begun months before the Exodus from Egypt became a fact.

I could like to shew you other most egregious errors of Colenso ; but, as I hinted before, I must refrain from such digression. I cannot, however, leave this history of the deliverance of the Israelites from their cruel bondage, without a few more words. The "ten plagues" were, doubtless,

inflicted on idolatrous Egypt, partly as a rebuke for her vile worship of serpents and creeping things, of the river Nile, and of the forces of nature under personal forms,—and of her grovelling sensuality, and utter disregard of the true God and His worship. You will find this maintained and enlarged upon by many writers. I wish, chiefly, to press upon your conviction the reality of this history, as a display of the moral government of God.

Jehovah permitted His people to suffer—permitted the tyrant Egyptians to exult, long, in their haughty tyranny—but He rises, at last, in grandeur and terror, and “makes bare His arm.” To my mind, the record of the whole series of transactions, from the moment that Moses beholds the burning bush—the sublime boldness of Moses in his challenge of Pharaoh—the “ten plagues”—the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart—the death of the firstborn and the eating of the Paschal lamb—the march of the Israelites, with the pillar of a cloud and of fire—their passage through the Red Sea on dry land—and the overwhelming of the Egyptians in the waters—with the triumphant song

of Miriam and the Israelitish women,—I say the record of the whole series of transactions I have thus imperfectly rehearsed, form together the grandest pages in all human history.

God is the great actor in this grand history; and it is worthy of Him. His own signal display of His moral character, as the chastiser of oppression, is as sublime as the display of His power. It is a lesson which has strengthened the hearts of His people—often the victims of oppression—in every age and in every land. Such deeds of the Almighty must have been real, or they would not have been commemorated, with every successive year, by the descendants of the ancient Israelites, wherever they may have sojourned, and whatever may have been their condition. And the fact that such deeds could not fail to be so commemorated by men, if the deeds were real, seems just as evident.

IX.

REVIEW OF THE RECORD OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES :
HEALING OF THE BLIND.

I WOULD now invite sceptical friends, who are present, to join me in an employment which, I am sure, will be a pleasing one to the Christian part of my audience. We have scanned arguments against the possibility and probability of Miracles—we have glanced at what ancient unbelievers thought about Miracles, and at what modern sceptics have said and reasoned about them—and we have considered, earnestly, and, I trust, conclusively, the unfoundedness of the aspersion that the Bible ascribes Miracles to Satan as well as to God :—Let us, now, ponder the record of the “signs and wonders and mighty deeds” wrought by Christ, according to the Evangelists—the record of what Christians hold to be true Miracles performed by the Saviour, in verification of His mission.

Leslie, one of the earliest writers in the last century, establishes *four criteria* respecting "the truth of matters of fact," as he phrases it, contained in the Scripture record :—" 1. That the matter of fact be such, as that men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, may be judges of it. 2. That it be done publicly in the face of the world. 3. That not only public monuments be kept up in memory of it, but some outward actions be performed. 4. That such monuments and such actions or observances be instituted, and do commence, from the time that the matter of fact was done." Facts, real facts, may be related without these four marks being produced to prove them ; but Leslie contends that a relation which has all these four marks cannot be false.

I do not propose that, while employing ourselves in a thoughtful review of our Saviour's Miracles, we confine ourselves to the dry, critical investigation marked out by Leslie. Let us spend a few moments, now and then, in such reflections as the nature of the record may kindle in our minds ; in order that our understandings may not only be convinced of the *verity* of Christ's Miracles,

but our affections be raised, gratefully, to God, under the impression of their *value*.

The Saviour signalised His power over inanimate Nature, the Gospel record tells us, and performed other deeds of "wonder," in verification of His mission ; but deeds of healing—deeds wrought for the relief of men's maladies and sufferings—form by far the greatest part of the catalogue of Miracles they have recorded for us : a fact which compels us to approach our investigation with mingled awe and gratitude.

Of Christ's deeds of healing, the giving of sight to the blind form the greatest in number : we will, therefore, consider them first. Blindness, be it remembered, is a disease much more common in the East than it is with us—owing to the prevalence of fine particles of sand in the air, and the practice of sleeping on the tops of houses and elsewhere, in the open air, at night :—so we need not wonder that of all Christ's cures these are most numerous. No cure performed by Him would attract more notice, since the blind were so many ; and the cure could not be counterfeited—at least, not for long : the counterfeit, if attempted, would soon be

found out. For blindness is, most essentially, an organic disease. It is not like some complaint which depends on the weak or disordered state of the nerves. That might be affected by fright, or sudden surprise. But a man born blind, or who had been blind for many years, could not be frightened or surprised into *true seeing*.

God has put a limit to possibilities of deceit. There could be no deceit in these deeds of healing of the blind, if the relation be true, as it is reported. They are instances of the usual order of Nature being transcended by Divine power: not occurrences which fulfil the "conditions of science:" it is God setting the "conditions of science" aside to establish the fact of Christ's Messiahship.

Matthew gives us several cases of healing of the blind. He seems to place the first at Capernaum (chap. ix.), as Jesus is leaving the house of Jairus, when two blind men follow Him, crying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" He does not seem to heed them the more because they address Him by one of the titles common among His countrymen for the promised Messiah. He lets

them press after Him, into another house, which He enters, and then demands whether they believe He can heal them. A sceptic may ask, "Why does He ask for men's faith before He will heal them? It sets one upon the suspicion that He only produced wonders by acting on their imagination, and thus leading them to self-deceit."

But there never was a case in which there was such an utter impossibility of trick on the part of Christ, and self-deceit on the part of the two men. When Christ has touched their eyes, and they see, He charges them "straitly" that they let no man know it. He is not a pretender who seeks a reputation as a wonder-worker. We know not His reasons for charging the men with silence. Doubtless, they were right reasons; but He does not give them. The men disobey Him; and whether they were right, as some of the Fathers—and, Archbishop Trench says, as all the Romish writers, say—or whether they were very wrong, as Canon Farrar says, in his popular "Life of Christ"—I shall not decide. Their resolute conduct, in "spreading abroad His fame in all that

country," plainly shews that they felt they had something worth talking about to tell, and something to tell worth hearing : it was no trick wrought by imagination.

Sometimes, the Evangelists give us whole groups of healing. Thus Matthew tells us (chap. xv.) that Jesus "came nigh the Sea of Galilee, and went up into a mountain, and sat down there ; and great multitudes came unto Him, having with them—lame, *blind*, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet—and *He healed them* : insomuch that the multitude wondered when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and *the blind to see* : and they glorified the God of Israel." Matthew must have witnessed this marvellous display of power and goodness ; and he must have been conscious, when he gave his Gospel to the world, that he was relating what many had witnessed, as well as himself.

Matthew's relation (chap. xx.) of the healing of "blind Bartimeus, the son of Timeus," is corroborated by Mark (chap. x.), Luke (chap. xviii.)—only, in this case, there occur two of the trifling "dis-

crepancies" of which some objectors make so much. Matthew says there were two blind men. And so there might have been, although Mark and Luke mention but one : undoubtedly, because the one—Bartimeus—was the better known, and, most likely, the loudest in his cry for help. The chief discrepancy is, that Matthew says the Miracle was wrought "as they departed *from* Jericho," and Mark and Luke say it was as they were coming *to* Jericho. The difficulty has never been cleared up ; but it is not one that should give us much concern : it shews that there was no juggling together of the Gospel writers, at any rate.

The distinctness and explicitness with which the Miracle itself is related by the three Evangelists render this cure of the blind worthy of our close attention. Jericho is about twenty-five miles from Jerusalem. It was a great residence of the priests, who came up "in their course" to minister in the temple, and returned to Jericho when others took their turn. It would be a great highroad between Jericho and the capital, and would often be thronged with travellers. The cry of the blind—"Son of David !"—always the favourite appella-

tive of the Messiah—would attract notice, and, coupled with the vehemence of Bartimeus, would be sure to draw a crowd. The crowd—or the priests that were in the crowd—rebuke the vehement man, but he cries the more loudly. Jesus stands still, and tells His disciples to fetch the blind man to Him. The Saviour thus takes care that there shall be no mistake about the Miracle. He, most likely, knew what unbelief there was in the hearts of those who had rebuked the blind.

More in earnest still is Bartimeus now. He casts away his garment—a ragged one, no doubt—and hastens to Christ. “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” asks the Saviour. “Lord, that I might receive my sight,” answers Bartimeus. “So Jesus had compassion, and touched their eyes,” says Matthew. Mark relates that Christ said, “Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole;” and Luke says that Christ said, “Receive thy sight, thy faith hath saved thee.” Most likely, not one of the Evangelists tells us *all* that Christ said; but they all declare that “immediately” the blind received sight, and followed Jesus.

I want you closely to observe how watchful and

wise Christ was—remembering the doubters, and perhaps scoffing priests, who were around Him—that the miracle should be so clear and palpable, that none could deny it. The healed blind followed Him in the way, “glorifying God, and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God,” says Luke.

Remember, this was not a deed in the usual order of Nature. No “conditions of Science” were observed here. Christ transcends the usual order of Nature. His Divine will is the power that gives sight to the blind. Remember, again, it cannot be said there was no means of testing the truth of the miracle. As the blind followed Christ, the people could put all sorts of questions to the men, especially such as had not known Bartimeus, —while those who knew him could tell the people that they had long known the blind beggar. You cannot conceive a case that would more deeply gall the unbelieving Pharisees, for it would bring them completely to a deadlock : the miracle would be so indisputable.

Matthew, lastly, relates that when Christ had entered Jerusalem on the ass, amid the cry of the

people, "Hosanna to the Son of David," that "the *blind* and the lame came to Him, in the temple ; and He healed them." What the number was that Jesus healed, we are not told ; but the publicity of the miracles thus performed in the temple was so great, that a more complete challenge to unbelief could not have been given.

Mark has but one relation, peculiar to himself, of the blind being healed (chap. viii.) : " And He cometh to Bethsaida ; and they bring a blind man unto Him, and besought Him to touch him. And He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town," says Mark. Christ would not let the townspeople see the miracle : they had already witnessed His miracles, but were hardened in unbelief. " Woe unto thee, Chorazin—woe unto thee, Bethsaida," we all remember well, were sorrowful words of Christ ; " for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, in sackcloth and ashes." Bethsaida was neither to be favoured by seeing this miracle, nor provoked by it into making some

attempt upon the Saviour's life—for some of its wicked inhabitants might have crowded round Him, to stone Him to death. But His "work" was not yet finished; and it was not in Bethsaida He was to be put to death.

Most likely, none but the Disciples saw the miracle. They would gather closely round Him, and Christ seems to have performed the miracle very gradually, in order that they might have time to observe it fully, and that it might make the deeper impression on their minds, and serve to deepen their conviction that He was the promised Messiah. For, immediately afterwards, Jesus asks them the decisive question—not only, "Whom do men say that I am?" but, "Whom say *ye* that I am?" and Peter answers, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." He, mysteriously, tells them that they are to tell no man that He is the Christ; and then He reveals to them—what to them is all mystery—that He is to "suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."

Mark only relates this miracle, and he had the account of it from Peter's own mouth—being Peter's

interpreter, and writing down the substance of Peter's preaching, as you have often been told. Peter had a strong memory for facts ; and he was sure to remember these facts clearly—his own inspired declaration of Christ's Messiahship, and the solemn revelation made by his Divine Master—all being woven together so remarkably by the miracle itself.

Christ spat on the man's eyes, and asked him if he saw aught. "And the man looked up and said, I see men as trees walking." After that, Christ put His hands on the blind man's eyes again, and made him look up. "And he was restored, and saw every man clearly." The man was *not* born blind ; so he knew they were men who were walking, but he compared them to trees, from the indistinctness of his vision.

The disciples could not fail to be convinced by the miracle. There was no ostentation or display. The miracle was performed slowly, that they might observe it completely, and thus have their minds strengthened before their Master uttered to them the sorrowful words, the alarming words, that followed, and that led Peter to rebuke his Master.

I beg of you again to reflect that no "conditions of Science" are observed in this miracle. Spitting on a man's blind eyes, and touching them, and telling him to look up, are *not* cures for blindness. Christ, again, was transcending the usual order of Nature, in giving sight to this blind man. Again, I beg of you to reflect that there could be no imposture in the case. Was the man bought or hired by Jesus of Nazareth to feign blindness, and then to pretend that he was healed? How could Jesus hire the man out of His poverty? Above all, how could Jesus feel sure He had *purchased* the man, who might get a weighty reward any day from the Pharisees and priests, by revealing the fact *that Jesus was an impostor?*

Luke has no relation of a single miracle of healing the blind peculiar to himself. He corroborates the narratives of the cure of blind Bartimeus, by Matthew and Mark, as we have seen: and he has one general relation of healing, peculiar to himself. John the Baptist, like all the rest of us, had his hours of temptation and trial. He seems to have become impatient about Christ—wondering, most likely, that Jesus did not assume supreme power,

and reign as a prince, at Jerusalem. And so he sends to Jesus one of his disciples to ask, "Art thou He that should come, or look we for another?"

And then Luke relates that in that same hour He cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits, and *unto many that were blind He gave sight*. And Jesus told the disciples of John to go their way, and tell John what things they had seen and heard, and how that *the blind saw*, etc., thus leaving the tempted Forerunner to draw the right conclusion.

John has one most remarkable narrative (chap. ix.) of the healing of the man who was born blind. Christ's disciples, full of Jewish prepossessions and prejudices, ask him *why* the man was *born blind*: was it a judgment of God for the sins of his parents, or for the man's own sins? The old doctrine of transmigration of souls was very widely spread, and was held by many in Palestine, in Christ's time: this doctrine taught that men were often punished in the present life for sins they had committed in some former state of existence.

Christ answers the disciples that the man was born blind that He Himself might display Divine

power by this peculiar act of healing. "As long as I am in the world," says Jesus, "I am the Light of the world:" that is to say, His very life and acts are to shew men that in Him is their salvation, and in no other. And then He makes clay with His spittle, and spreads the moistened clay upon the blind man's eyes, and says, "Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash!" Like any other man who had been long blind, this man would be able to make his way thither quickly, without a guide, the pool being well known.

The man, too, seems to have been well known to the crowd, and there is soon great excitement about him. If any of you who hear me are not familiar with the ninth chapter of John's Gospel, I entreat you to read it. There is not a more fascinating chapter in the whole New Testament. The picturesque character of the narrative is perfect; it constitutes a narrative of such perfect versimilitude, or likeness to truth, that you cannot conceive it to be *untrue*: the very manner and spirit of the story seem to proclaim that it was written by an eye and ear witness.

It is another of the miracles which the Saviour

performed on the Sabbath—meaning to correct the slavish superstition of the Jews. The bold uprightness and vigorous common-sense of the healed blind man, as contrasted with the perverse unbelief of the Sanhedrim—their renewed questioning of him, and his firm defence of the Saviour, and declaration that he is Christ's disciple—the manner in which the man (a poor beggar) turns the tables upon men of authority, and convicts them of inconsistency, so that they “cast him out” in anger—completes the sparkling and dramatic character of the narrative.

Jesus, no doubt, employed the moistened clay to draw closer attention to what He did. To use our modern language again, Christ meant the observers to take note that what He was doing was not within the “conditions of Science.” For moistened clay, by getting into the eyes of a man who could see, might cause him to be blind ; but it could never cure the eyes of a man who was born blind. Jesus meant the crowd to observe that He was really acting as the “Light of the world :” He was transcending the usual order of Nature, and thus proving Himself above Nature, its order, and forces.

The Pharisees could not resist the evidence for the miracle. "Give God the praise!" they exhorted the blind man: "we know that this man is a sinner." Their wickedness and superstitious prejudices impelled them to oppose Christ, because He had denounced their guilty covetousness and hypocrisy in scathing terms; and they found a way of venting their malice without losing their popularity, by crying out that Jesus "was a sinner;" He must be in league with evil spirits, since He broke the Sabbath! Thus the prevailing belief in intercourse with demons came to their aid as a cover for their ill-will to the great Miracle-Worker.

X.

REVIEW OF THE RECORD OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES :
HEALING OF THE DEAF AND DUMB, LEPERS,
PARALYTICS, AND OTHER DISEASED PERSONS.

THE Evangelists tell us that Christ displayed His Divine compassion more frequently in the cure of the blind than of any other form of human affliction. We may consider other instances of healing, for some time, without any special order.

Matthew told us, you will remember, how "great multitudes came to Him," on a mountain nigh the sea of Galilee, "having with them lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and *many others*, and cast them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them." Mark (chap. vii.) gives us one of these "many others." He selects the healing of a deaf and dumb man, out of the crowd who were brought to be healed on that same mountain, nigh the sea of Galilee, for very special and graphic description. Or, let me speak

more correctly, Mark writes down from Peter's preaching, what that fact-noting fisherman-apostle could not help telling over and over again ; because what he saw and heard was so remarkable.

Thus Peter, in his thorough matter-of-fact way, relates how Jesus put His fingers into the deaf man's ears, and spat, and then touched the dumb man's tongue, and "looking up to heaven, He sighed," and then "saith unto him"—that is, to the deaf and dumb man—"Ephphatha, that is, Be opened." And then Peter tells us that "straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain."

We are told that Christ took the man aside from the multitude. No reason can be imagined for this, similar to that for which Jesus took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town of Bethsaida. The only motive we can conceive for Christ's act, in this instance, is that He sought to impress the minds of His disciples—the men who were to be also the "chosen witnesses" that He had risen from the dead—with the certainty of the miracle. What He did, He did thus slowly, and step by step, that—to use again the language of

our own day—He might make it clear that His healing of the man was out of the “conditions of Science :” He was transcending the usual order of Nature. He was thus, again and again, producing to their minds the credentials of His mission : He was sealing still more impressively, on their convictions, the fact that He was the promised Messiah.

You all know that there is a disease in the East—of which, happily, we have now no instances in our country—which is one of inexpressible misery : the leprosy. The Gospel writers tell us that Christ often healed this dreadful malady. One instance is related by the three Synoptics (as the Germans call them), Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus has finished His “Sermon on the Mount,” and great multitudes are following Him, when a leper comes and worships Him, and says, “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean !” And then we read, “Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean : and immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

Jesus, as the new Divine Legislator, had just been pronouncing the great Christian body of Law ; and He seals His Divine authority, before His

disciples and the multitude, by this striking and instantaneous act of mercy and power, and thus, again, transcends the usual order of Nature.

There were no "conditions of Science" observed here: a touch and a few words—unless He that touched and spoke the words had wielded Divine power—could not have restored the unclean and unsightly leper. The leper had been duly examined by a priest, or he would not have been allowed to go at large—with rent garments, and a covering on his upper lip, crying "Unclean, unclean," as he stood at some distance from other human beings—lest any should touch him, and thereby become unclean. There could be no collusion between Jesus and the priest. The horrible disease is seen at once; and the cure was instant. Christ directs the man to go and shew himself to the priest, offer his gift, as Moses ordained for lepers when they were healed: the Saviour takes care that what multitudes have seen, the priests shall know of,—that they, also, may understand that the promised Messiah has come. Be it observed that Christ hastens the man away, saying, "See thou tell no man"—meaning that he is not to loiter and prate

about his cure, but to hasten and offer his gift at Jerusalem, so that the deed of healing be fully sealed to be a fact. His disease seems to have been of the severest kind ; for Luke the physician says the man was "full of leprosy."

More lepers were cleansed by the Saviour than we are acquainted with by any particular and personal narrative of their cases. *And the lepers are cleansed,*" was part of the summary of proofs of His Messiahship, delivered by Jesus Himself, to the disciples and messengers of John the Baptist.

Luke, only, gives us the case of the healing of a group of ten lepers (chap. xvii.) One alone, we learn, turned back to thank the Great Physician, and he was a Samaritan. These lepers were also sent to the priest, to offer their gift for their cure. Yes : Christ submits this cure also to the priests—His worst enemies ! What a test of the reality of the miracle, and of His own consciousness of miraculous power !

Again, I urge on even the most sceptical person present to consider that this could be no case of possible collusion with the lepers : Christ must have known that ten men could not be trusted to

keep a secret, for betraying which they would have obtained a ready reward from His malignant enemies.

Instances of the cure of palsy by the Saviour are related by the three Synoptics. One is given by all the three. It is that notable one whereby we learn that faith in Christ's power to heal, and determination to apply to Him, were so strong both in the paralytic and his friends, that he was "borne of four" to the top of the house in Capernaum, where Jesus was teaching—and that they broke up the covering, or roof, of the house, and let the palsied man down into the Saviour's presence.

Jesus is teaching in the presence of "Pharisees and doctors of the law, sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem." The house was so crowded that "there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door."

Here is, indeed, a challenge to the Saviour's courage and power, as well as an appeal to His goodness and compassion. Does He shrink from the challenge? He answers the appeal before it is

spoken :—" Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer : thy sins be forgiven thee " (Matt. ix. 2).

Of course, the Pharisees, " sitting by," say within themselves, " This man blasphemeth ! "—or, as Luke has it, " Why doth this man speak blasphemies ? Who can forgive sins, but God only ? " Jesus shews them that He knows their thoughts—that He *can forgive sins*, and does *not* blaspheme. He heals the man, and tells him to take up his bed and go to his house. We learn from Matthew and Mark, that when the crowd saw the Miracle, they wondered, and " glorified God ; " but Luke adds, they " were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day." One cannot help thinking that it was the bad Pharisees who were filled with fear, and said this. For once, they were too much frightened to indulge in malicious speech.

There could be no collusion in this case—no conspiracy of the four men who carried the paralytic, with Jesus, to impose a seeming miracle on the credulity of the multitude. It would soon have been discovered, if there had been any such conspiracy. Observe again, that this is *not* according

to the "conditions of Science." Christ speaks, and the man is healed, and takes up his bed, and goes home, praising God. Christ again is transcending the usual order of Nature : His word is sufficient to heal—for it is backed by His Divine power.

The infirm man whom John mentions (chap. v.) as having lain often at the pool of Bethesda—waiting for the moving of the water—is also held to have been a paralytic. The Saviour does not take hold of the man, and place him in the pool. Neither the man nor the multitude could attribute the man's cure to the healing powers of the water. Christ says, "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk!" and then we read "*immediately* the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked."

No "conditions of Science," I repeat, are observed here. Jesus transcends—and immediately—the usual order of Nature. Not one word had been spoken by Christ to shew that He would heal the man, before He said, "Rise!" The man does not know Jesus ; but very many must have known the man, for his case was one of thirty-eight years' infirmity. The cure seems to have been performed

at Passover time, when hundreds of thousands were crowding into Jerusalem. And this miracle also was wrought on a Sabbath day : Jesus, no doubt, intending thus to draw the greater attention to His own act, but also to correct the superstitious notions of the Jews.

The cure of the man with the withered hand—recorded by the three Synoptics—is also one of Christ's Sabbath cures. Christ found the man in the synagogue, at Capernaum. The question is raised whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath day ; and Jesus solves it, at once, by saying to the man, "Stretch forth thine hand," and we read again, without any pause in the narrative, "And he stretched it forth, and it was restored whole, like as the other."

Mark assures us (c. iii.)—following the preaching of Peter, whose keen powers of observation never missed a fact of real importance, when he was present to witness it, that the Saviour bade the man "stand forth," or rise up and stand in the midst of the congregation, so that he might be seen, and the miracle be made undeniably manifest. He knew the evil there was in the hearts of the Pharisees, and

thus dared it. They went out, we read, and took counsel how they might destroy Him. Yet they had not dared to deny the Miracle. Luke tells us that they were "filled with madness." What horrible wretches, we think, these hypocritical creatures must have been !

And what calm confidence in His own possession of power must Jesus have had to dare the malignity of these bad men, who, He was conscious, would not credit His Miracles, but would perversely attribute them to Satanic power ! I must again charge you to remember that all "conditions of Science" were wanting in this Miracle. The Saviour again transcends the usual order of Nature.

Ought not the base conduct of the unbelieving Pharisees to form additional evidence to us ? Had Christ's Miracles always been wrought among believers—among witnesses, some of whom might have thought it wrong to expose a fraud—among partisans, who would have readily borne witness to the truth of the Miracles, in order to strengthen what they believed to be a good cause—we might have concluded that the testimony was, after all, suspicious. But the signs and wonders and mighty

deeds of Jesus are performed in the presence of the men of power, who are "filled with madness" against Him, and who are thirsting for His heart's blood. Yet He dares their enmity! Can *He* have doubted the truth of His own glorious mission?

Luke gives us (c. xiii.) another of the Sabbath cures: that of the "woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself." This narrative is chiefly remarkable for the severity with which Jesus reprehends the ruler of the synagogue: the "hypocrite," as Christ calls him, who tells the people to come and be healed on other days, and *not* on the Sabbath. The best and noblest pages in Archbishop Trench's "Notes on the Miracles of our Lord," are those in which he explains and eulogizes the Saviour's conduct towards the Pharisees, whose prejudices respecting the Sabbath were so unworthy of men professing superior enlightenment, and who claimed to be the leaders of the people.

Luke, the physician, who naturally gives us more instances of healing disease than do the other evan-

gelists, presents us with the narrative of another Sabbath miracle of Christ: that of the man who had a dropsy (c. xiv.). There is here, again, the spirit of challenge in Christ's act. He goes into a Pharisee's house to eat bread—where “they watched Him.” Christ doubtless knew that the invitation was hollow, but He accepted it. And when He had healed the man, and defended His own act, and asked for their reasons for silently and maliciously condemning it—“they could not answer Him,” says Luke.

The healing of the Centurion's paralytic servant, recorded by Matthew (c. viii.) and Luke (c. vii.), and the healing of the nobleman's son of a fever, related by John (c. iv.), both present us with a new phase in Christ's history. Instead of being watched and maligned by wicked priests and Pharisees, He is, in these instances, courted and entreated by persons of rank and authority, to exercise His healing power. He complies, and in both instances the cure is effected at a distance—demonstrating the plenary nature of the Saviour's miraculous influence.

Matthew's record must have been read by some in Galilee who knew of the miracle, and the

"elders" of Capernaum were not likely to be in league with Jesus ; neither could the "nobleman" be in conspiracy with Him. There is no ground for suspicion in either case. Nor were the "conditions of Science" observed. The Saviour completely transcends the usual order of Nature.

Another Sabbath cure—that of Peter's wife's mother—is related by the three Synoptics. The cure was performed in Peter's house. Matthew (c. viii.) says that Christ "touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and ministered unto them." Luke (c. iv.) says that Christ "rebuked the fever," which that evangelist and physician also calls a "great fever." The miracle is narrated in Mark's first chapter, an indication that Peter told the story almost always in the beginning of a sermon. And it seems natural that he should do so, seeing the miracle was performed in his own house, and the person healed was his own wife's mother.

The healing of the woman who was afflicted with an issue of blood is also related by the Synoptics ; but it is Peter, in Mark's report (c. v.), from whom we have the plain spoken account, that she "had suffered many things of many physicians, and had

spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but *rather grew worse.*" Luke, we must remember, was a physician himself, and so he quietly says (c. viii.) that she had "spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any."

The perfect *consciousness* that Christ had of His own healing power receives a confirmation of a peculiar kind in the history of this miracle. He proclaims that somebody has touched Him, and received healing from Him ; and when there is a general denial, He repeats the proclamation, until the woman comes forward, trembling, and falling down before Him, declares for what purpose she had touched Him, and "how she was healed immediately."

I cannot help enforcing on your notice what no commentator would enforce—but what I feel it to be my duty to enforce again and again : not only the perfect consciousness that Christ had of His own healing power, but the never-forgetful constancy and perseverance with which He sought to impress those around Him with this fact of His miraculous power. He was intent on the people observing it, and being convinced of it, in order

that they might feel they had undeniable and complete proof of His mission. He was *not* observing "conditions of Science:" He was transcending the usual order of Nature, and He meant that this should be known by all.

Surely, this repetition of the Saviour's practice, of striving to impress the people with what he was doing, ought to put an end to all questioning as to the *value* of Christ's miracles.

XI.

REVIEW OF THE RECORD OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES:
RAISING OF THE DEAD TO LIFE.

THE Saviour is presented to us, in the Gospels, not only as healing all manner of sickness and disease, but as restoring the dead to life. The anonymous author of "Supernatural Religion" says that "The raising of Jairus' daughter has long been abandoned as a case of restoration to life by all critics and theologians, except the few who still persist in ignoring the distinct and positive declaration of Jesus, *The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*"

But I tell you, most undisguisedly, that I do not think the declaration of Jesus is so "distinct and positive" as this author asserts it to be. They that were weeping for the maiden's death, and the minstrels gathered to play their dirge for the dead, we are told, *laugh Him to scorn*: they, evidently, all feel confident that she is dead. And we learn, too,

that a messenger had been sent to request Jairus *not* to trouble Christ, for the maid was dead. When Christ said, "She is not dead, but sleepeth," He must have meant that her death, or state of lifelessness, would be but temporary, for He was about to restore her to life.

In the presence of Peter and James and John, and of her own father and mother, Jesus takes her by the hand, and says, "Maiden, arise!"—*Talitha cumi*, in Syriac. Peter's interpreter—as in the case of the healing of the deaf and dumb man—gives us the very words, which the apostle remembered so well. They who had laughed Him to scorn are all "astonished with a great astonishment," when she instantly awakes to life.

Jairus, the father of the maiden, was a ruler of the synagogue, a person not at all likely to apply to Christ, unless utter despair of a cure by an ordinary physician had driven him to Christ's presence as a suppliant. There could be no collusion between such a person as Jairus and Christ. Rulers of synagogues were civil magistrates, as well as managing officers of Jewish worship. Jairus must have thought that he was letting himself down

sorely in the eyes of his neighbours to utter a begging petition to the carpenter's son.

The restoration to life of the widow's son of Nain is another of the three instances given us in the Gospels of Christ's resurrection power. Matthew (c. ix.), Mark (c. v.), Luke (c. viii.) record the raising up of Jairus' daughter : Luke alone (c. vii.) gives us this recital. Jesus meets the funeral procession coming out of the gates of Nain, a little town which is now in ruins, but which, Dean Stanley informs us, still keeps its name ; and Canon Farrar thinks " the rock-hewn sepulchres on the hill-side may well be as old as the time of Christ, and it was probably to one of them that the youth's body was being carried."

Christ compassionates the weeping mother, lays His hand on the bier, " and they who carried stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise ! And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak ; and He delivered him to his mother." Such is the brief, touching narrative.

The young man was not in a coffin, like our dead when we carry them to the grave. How he sat up and began to speak, could be seen and

heard by the funeral crowd and the crowd that came with Jesus. The whole transaction was sudden. There could be no underhand dealing in it. If either this young man, or the daughter of Jairus, had been in a swoon, and was not really dead, how was it that all the loud weeping and the noise of the minstrels had not roused them? The deaths, in both instances, must have been real—and their restoration to life, likewise. Christ spoke—and it was done. No “conditions of Science” were observed. The Lord and Giver of Life transcended the usual order of Nature. “There came a fear on all, and they glorified God,” says Luke. And he also says that “this rumour of Him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about.” We are not, therefore, to suppose that Matthew and Mark knew nothing about this miracle. But their omission of it shews that there was no juggling together among the Evangelists.

We approach what has been called the great conclusive miracle of Christ—the Raising of Lazarus. And we are not to suppose, because

John (chap. xi.) only narrates it, that Matthew, Mark, and Luke knew nothing of it. A sceptical critic might as well contend that since John only records *seven* miracles, he knew of no more. I have not the slightest doubt in my own mind, that the reason suggested long ago, by Grotius, (which Archbishop Trench rejects,) is the true reason why the Synoptics say not one word about Lazarus. It was that they might not draw attention to Him, and thus make the enemies of Christ more eager to put Him to death. The tradition is that Lazarus lived thirty years after Jesus raised him from the dead. John lived, at least, thirty years after the death of Lazarus, and would feel perfectly free, at the close of our first century, to write about Lazarus.

Bayle says that Spinoza was accustomed to declare that, if he could believe Jesus really raised Lazarus from the dead, he would throw away his philosophy, and espouse Christianity, at once. The record is so striking, that it is only equalled in verisimilitude by the account of the healing of the man who was born blind, also by John (chap. xi.). One does not wonder that it made a strong

impression even on the mind of so placid a philosopher as Spinoza.

Renan disgraces himself by telling his readers that Jesus joined in a secret plot, and agreed that Lazarus should counterfeit death, and He Himself should play the part of a sham-resurrectionist. But, if the plotters possessed their senses, they would have laid the scene of it in another quarter: not within two miles of Jerusalem—which Jesus had left so lately, because of the murderous malice and bloody purpose of His enemies. The sham-resurrection, had it been one, would have been played in some distant corner of Palestine. Christ came to Bethany, at the strong solicitation of the sisters of Lazarus—and the Miracle enflames the Pharisees and priests still more against Him, so that He withdraws again, and retires to Ephraim.

But how could the deed be false? how could it be a deception? It was performed in open day, and in the presence of, most likely, a considerable company of observers. Some went off to tell the Pharisees what Jesus had done—but the Pharisees instituted no enquiry: for we surely should have heard of it, if there ever had been one, from Celsus,

or Porphyry, or Julian. They made no inquisition whether it were not all a trick. All that we read is—"Then gathered the chief priests and Pharisees a council"—and when they have laid their perverse heads together, they resolve on His death, and "took counsel" how to bring it to pass.

Lazarus could not have been in a swoon: there are no swoons that last four days. There are well-authenticated accounts of trances which have lasted five days; but if Lazarus were only in a trance, how came the trance to end just when Jesus spoke? Most likely, physicians had visited Lazarus—for he and his sisters, evidently, were not of the poorer class; and the physicians must either have seen Lazarus dying or dead.

Since the alleged plot, and either swoon or trance, are all alike unworthy of one moment's credit, sceptics can only say, as a last word, that the account is a fiction—a romance. If so, it is the most like a truth in its manner of relation, of any romance that one ever heard of. John could not invent it. He seems to have been almost constantly with Jesus; and loved Christ so well that he would never tell lies about Him, even if

he had been as wicked as he was holy. Strauss, of course, feels positive, that the Resurrection of Lazarus is only one of the mythical stories created by the early Christian Church, which found its way into writing somewhere about the middle of the second century.

But would not the story have been more marvellous, if it had been a mere myth, or a forgery? Would it not have affirmed that Lazarus lay in the grave *four months*, instead of four days? Would there not have been a more startling description of his rising? Would it have related that the stone was rolled away at the command of Christ? Would not the rising Lazarus have been depicted as displaying such supernatural strength as to hurl away the stone, and stand, in a moment, before the observers?

The grandeur of the transaction is described as being too real for it to have been a sham, or the record a fiction. Those sublime words of the Saviour can be no invention—"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And he that liveth and believeth in me, shall never die."

Who could have invented them? A bad man? His wickedness could not reach the elevation of mind necessary for conceiving the words; and a good man could not lie, or commit such a forgery.

I say, again, I do not wonder at the saying Bayle attributes to Spinoza. The miracle is truly grand as well as palpable. It is attested so clearly by the fact that Lazarus is with the company that sit at meat with Christ afterwards; and the deed was instant—"Lazarus, come forth!" and he comes forth.

No "conditions of Science" are observed here, I say again—perhaps for the twentieth time: I have not counted. Here, indeed, the Saviour transcends the order of Nature, and seals His glorious mission.

XII.

REVIEW OF THE RECORD OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES:
DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL SPIRITS.

I COME to the cases of Demoniactal possession related in the Gospels, without any hesitancy or indecision; because my mind has long been made up to the conclusion that they were *real*—notwithstanding all that cautious critics, Christian and sceptical, advance by way of demurrer. I do not pretend to any sage perception, as to *how* the Demons “possessed” human beings. I only contend that such “possession” was *an objective fact*—to use the jargon of modern philosophers: and that it was not mere imagination, or crazy conceit in the persons “possessed.”

I desert Hugh Farmer, when we come to this question. He was firmly of opinion that all the cases, of what are called Demoniactal possession, recorded in the Gospels, were simply cases of

mania, or madness. I cannot come to his conclusion—for I hold that Archbishop Trench is right, when he says—referring to the fact that Christ spoke of these cases of dread affliction, as cases of *real* Demoniactal possession—

“Our idea of Christ’s absolute veracity, apart from the value of the truth which He communicated, forbids us to suppose that He could have spoken as He did, being perfectly aware all the while that there was no corresponding reality to justify the language which He used. . . . Would there not here be that absence of agreement between thoughts and words, in which the essence of a lie consists? . . . and what should we have here for a King of Truth?”

Prebendary Row seeks to drive the Archbishop into a corner, by quoting some of these words, and reasoning thus: “If this position is correct, it involves a principle far more extensive than the case immediately before us. It is nothing less than that our Lord, neither in His formal teaching nor in His conversation, should have used language which was other than scientifically correct.” Nay, the Prebendary reasons that, if the Archbishop be

correct, Christ ought to have corrected every scientific error current among the Jews. I humbly think—for you know, it is a perilous step to put one's-self between two distinguished churchmen—I humbly think that the Prebendary, by trying to make out a very strong case against the Arch-prelate, has failed altogether.

Christ did not come into the world to correct men's scientific errors ; but He came to speak truth. His whole life might have been taken up in correcting men's errors on scientific matters, and His great mission have failed. But, although the great business of the Saviour was not to undeceive men with regard to all the mistakes they made, and the misconceptions they formed of the facts, forces, and order of Nature—neither was it His business, or in agreement with His Divine and holy character, to contribute to their errors, to strengthen their misconceptions, and build them up in their self-deceit.

The authors of the Gospels, beyond a doubt, believed that the cases they report were veritable cases of demoniacal possession. Matthew, Peter, and John, among the disciples, it is thus clear, were believers ; and Luke, the physician, while reporting

Christ's history, does not lay claim to any superior "enlightenment," or hint in any way, that he was not of the vulgar opinion on Demoniactal possession.

And we should have wondered indeed, if the Gospel-writers had told us that *they* questioned the reality of "possession." How could they do this, when they tell us that *Christ spoke to the demons as real beings?*

Reasoners on the other side remind us that when a kind and intelligent physician talks to a maniac in his own crazy vein, and humours him by affecting to believe that he *is* a king, or an emperor—no one blames the physician, but, rather, praises him for his display of intelligent kindness. Are such reasonings worth a straw? No one will think they are, who remembers that when we measure the language and conduct of Christ, it must be, not by the faulty scale of human imperfection and weakness, but by the standard of eternal truth. Christ could not play at *make-believe*. If I could imagine *that* for one moment, my life-long and never wavering worship of the perfect moral beauty of Christ would end at once.

The story of the Demoniac in the country of the

Gadarenes is most frequently referred to in this discussion. And no wonder, for it is the most fearful picture of "possession" drawn by the Evangelists. Peter's words, as copied by Mark, (v.) reveal to us what a terrible impression had been made upon his impressible nature by the demoniac. Peter tells us that the wretched man met Christ immediately as He came out of the ship, and "came and worshipped Him, and cried with a loud voice, What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure Thee by God, that Thou torment me not. For He saith unto him, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit! and He asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. And he besought Him much that He would not send them out of the country."

The Evangelist had just told us that this miserable man "had his dwelling among the tombs, and no man could bind him, no not with chains: because that he had often been bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and

day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones."

"Yes yes—the picture is dreadful : there is no denying that," some sceptical hearer will be saying ; "but all this might be mere madness. And notwithstanding that Mark, as you call him, tells us that Jesus said, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit !" we do not understand how another spirit could be in the man's spirit. There is nothing of the kind in our own day."

But there might be many instances of demoniacal possession in Christ's day. It might be that evil spirits were permitted to signalize their existence and their power and malignancy more fully during Christ's ministry, than at any other time—before or since—in order that the Saviour might display His power over them, and thus increase the proofs of the reality of His mission. And let me remind sceptical friends that though they do *not understand* how "another spirit" could possess, or "be in the man's spirit"—that cannot determine the question. No one who admits the fact of man's spiritual nature will, for a moment, positively deny the existence of other spiritual natures. And, although

a sceptic does *not believe* in the existence of any spiritual natures, I never conversed with any sceptic who would undertake to say that he *was sure* there were no spiritual natures.

I ask sceptical friends present if they understand all the movements of their own minds. Can they tell us, or explain to themselves, *how it is* that sudden evil thoughts arise in the mind—yea, make their way into our consciousness, sometimes in the midst of our most serious reflections? “Law of association of ideas”—are you ready to name? I do not believe in the existence of such a law. It is only the *cant* of philosophy; for philosophy has its cant, as well as religion. You cannot trace any links of “association” in your “ideas,” in thousands of instances. Philosophers, as a cloak for the ignorance they do not like to confess, prate about the “law of association of ideas” just as ignoramuses allege that all the phenomena of earth and air, which they cannot understand, are caused by *electricity*.

We understand nothing so imperfectly as the nature of our own minds. To me, there is nothing more probable than that the thinkings within me,

and the images suddenly presented to my inward vision, are often the creation of other spiritual natures. I do not believe that I say this from simple credulity. I do not readily swallow any unearthly story. What is called "spiritualism" at this time of day, appears to me to be the sheerest folly. I always suspect that there is something wrong in a man's upper story, who believes in spiritualism.

Some of you who are believers in it may think me arrogant in talking thus, and may say that I have never enquired into the evidence of its truth. I must confess that I have made but little enquiry, and it is because I was met by such a rehearsal of foolishness in the outset as to rob me of all will to proceed further.

Yet, though I discard "spiritualism,"—I mean, what I deem the delusion of the day,—I believe in the existence of spiritual beings. I hold that

"There are more things in heaven and earth,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

I believe it to be as great a verity as my own existence, that

“Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
Unseen, both when we sleep and when we wake.”

I do not know whether Shakespeare and Milton expressed *their own belief* thus. I can only say that their words express mine. Byron believed in the existence of spirits, and Scott's belief was held by some to amount to superstition. Shelley only deceived himself if he thought he was an atheist : he deals more in spirits than any other poet that could be named. I might go on to name Bacon, and other great names, to shew that I hold myself to be in good company, intellectually, when I profess my belief in the existence of spiritual natures, but I forbear.

I know that Materialists will tell me that if we understood all the changes of the brain, we might be able to account for sudden and unexpected temptations to evil—for all unruly and ungovernable thoughts—for seeming presentations of evil, or reminiscences of guilty thoughts, without any discernible cause of them—in brief, for all aberrations of thought—without imputing them to the suggestions of evil spirits. But, since Materialists themselves do not understand *all* the changes of the brain—

nor *any* of them—I decline to take their sapient “if,” as the solution of any mystery.

“The question really resolves itself into the following one,” says Prebendary Row, shrewdly, “Do evil beings, other than man, exist in the universe? or, if they exist, is it credible that they are allowed to interfere in the affairs of men? If we free ourselves from the trammels of *à priori* theories, and judge only by the facts of the universe as it exists, neither their existence nor their intervention in human affairs is contrary to our reason.”

I believe, however, with the same excellent writer, that evil spirits never interfere in human concerns, nor have any access to the human mind, except by Divine permission. Satan himself cannot approach the mind of any of us without such permission. The most absurd notions of Satan’s power are current with some people—notions to which the Scripture gives no encouragement, if we read it thoughtfully.

“Do not forget that you did not finish the account of the Demoniac who said his name was Legion,” some of our sceptical friends will be saying. “What

do you think about the pigs, sir? Don't forget to tell us what you think about the pigs!"

That is an old familiar request from sceptics, and I used to be as merry about it as they were, over twenty years ago. But what I think "about the pigs" gives me no merriment now.

The degraded depths of vileness to which human nature may sink are inconceivable. The atrocity of calculation with which we often read that murders are effected, and then attempted to be concealed—the brutal returns for most self-sacrificing affection and attachment—the callousness of murderers and seducers—the remorseless gloating over their victims—all the daily details of crime presented to us by the newspapers of our own day—serve to remind me constantly of what Scripture affirms: "The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked—who can know it?"

And in what filth are degraded human natures willing to live! How abhorrent in filthiness are the haunts—the chosen haunts—of the degraded among the criminal classes—those only know who have ventured to visit them. They express no

disgust with their surroundings. They wallow in sin, like swine in the mire.

Does this give me no insight into the request of the evil spirits that possessed the wretched man who said his name was Legion? I feel it does open to my understanding the very naturalness of their obscene request. If they were not allowed to torture man, they craved to have possession of the brutal swine. To have the power of torturously ruling even brute creatures would gratify beings sunk in sin and rebellion as they were. They exercised their newly acquired power too rashly—for they impelled the swine to leap headlong into the sea, and get drowned.

“Do you really believe that?” asks a sceptical hearer, “and do ye think the devils were drowned, too?”

I really believe that the swine were drowned by the impulse wickedly given to them by the evil spirits.

“But Canon Farrar, as you may read in his new ‘Life of Christ,’ does not believe that part of the story.”

I care not for that. I am not bound to believe, or disbelieve, with any Canon of Westminster, or of St. Paul's either. I was going on to say, that although I do not believe that spirits can drown, I conclude that these evil spirits—like other beings greedy of sin—defeated their own purpose, and lost the riot in swinish natures that they had coveted.

Concealment does not suit me—and I do not dread the ridicule which may visit me from sceptical quarters while I thus tell you my belief. Think the matter out for yourselves. I have striven to do so ; and I have given you my honest conclusion.

We have no foundation for concluding that evil spirits, in Christ's time, had power over wicked men only. Often, no doubt, the entire surrender of a bad man's will to wickedness—as in the case of Judas Iscariot—prepared the way, and Satan knew it to be the signal of permission, for him to enter and rule the bad man's spirit. But the case of the child whom the disciples strove to heal, and could not, forbids us to conclude that the extreme wickedness of a human creature constituted the

only reason why Demoniactal possession was permitted.

Still this very case adds to our perplexity as to the reasons why the Almighty permitted evil spirits to "possess" men. If not really a child, the son of the distressed father who besought Christ so pitifully to heal him, must have been young, and, we are naturally disposed to conclude, not far gone in the paths of sin. Yet the suffering inflicted on this young man was very great! And, moreover, the hold which the evil spirit had upon the sufferer was such, that it could not easily be loosened—for Jesus utters the strange and solemn words to the disciples, "*This kind* goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting."

As Jesus did not come into the world to correct men's scientific errors, and explain to them the true form of the solar system, or to teach the doctrine of gravitation, or the facts of magnetism and chemistry and geology—so neither did He come to reveal to men during their abode in this mortal state, *why* the Divine Maker permits unseen spirits of evil to have "possession" of men, or *how* the nature of evil spirits enables them to

take and keep such "possession." "Possession" is one of the million-million facts we shall never understand in this world ; but that forms no reason why we should disbelieve in the possibility of it.

A man may think himself entitled to ask no end of quizzical questions about Demoniactal possession, at one time of his life ; but he may live to think a little deeper, and find that all his old questioning was but shallow trifling.

XIII.

REVIEW OF THE RECORD OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES:
HIS DISPLAYS OF POWER OVER INANIMATE AND
LOWER ANIMAL NATURE.

IT now remains, after considering as fully as time would permit the Gospel accounts of those miracles of Christ which consisted in healing of disease, raising the dead, and casting out demons—that we spend some moments in reflection upon the records left us by the Evangelists, which assert His miraculous power over inanimate and lower animal nature.

Christ's first miracle, as related by John, is one of this order. I fear, some people wish the account of this miracle were not found in the New Testament. Ought we not, however, to be glad that it is there? Surely it adds to the beauty and grace of the Saviour's character, that He can "rejoice with them that rejoice," as well as "weep with them that weep"—that He did not feel His purity to be sul-

lied in countenancing the mirth of chaste marriage. I shall not enter into 'Temperance' disputes about the kind of wine that was given by the miraculous act of the Saviour to the guests, or apologise for the seeming great quantity of it. Let objectors and cavillers read books on Eastern customs, and they will learn that wedding feasts often lasted several days, and were frequented by fresh arrivals of guests.

Commentators hold that either the bride or bridegroom was related to the mother of Jesus, from the fact that she seemed deeply concerned in all that was going on, and directed the servants to do whatever Jesus bade them do. I wonder why more notice has not been taken of the interrogative form given to Christ's reply, by Gregory Nyssen: I mean His reply to His mother's words, "They have no wine."

In our English translation, as in our common "recension" of the Greek Testament, Jesus replies, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." The ancient Father I have named makes the second part of Christ's reply also a question: "What tie is there between

thee and me? Is not my hour yet come?" That is to say, "Do I not know that it *is* come?" I cannot help thinking that Gregory Nyssen's reading is the right one—for Mary instantly says to the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it!"

If Jesus had given the reply which He gives in our authorised New Testament—a reply which evidently repels her suggestion that He shall perform some signal deed to supply the company with wine—how could she have turned round and uttered the words to the servants, which plainly shew that she believed He would act miraculously on her suggestion? I repeat, that I wonder why scholars have not taken more notice of Gregory Nyssen's reading.

"This beginning of miracles," says John, "did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him." Christ had but five or six disciples at that time: John himself was one, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel (or Bartholomew), and perhaps James the brother of John, were the others. John's language seems to affirm that a strong reason for

Jesus performing the miracle was to give these early disciples solid cause for believing Him to be the Messiah.

There are no "conditions of Science" to be traced here. The pots of stone stood by, as the custom was, for holding sufficient water to serve for all the washing of hands common at feasts. "Fill the water-pots with *water*," said Christ. And they filled them up to the brim. "Draw out, now, and bear unto the governor of the feast," says Jesus. The governor tasted *wine*, and praised its excellence to the bridegroom: he did not know of Christ's miracle, John informs us, while he commended the wine to the bridegroom, but the servants knew, and they could not fail to behold the change of water into wine without astonishment. Most likely they were forbidden, both by Jesus and His mother, from publishing the miracle at once to the company.

The busy passing to and fro of the guests, and their eager greetings of one another, would also tend to prevent any particular attention being given to Christ or to the servants—but His disciples were intent on what He did, and they saw the

miracle, and "believed on Him." Had Christ essayed to perform a miracle, and failed—the disciples, doubtless, would have left Him.

Jesus transcends the usual order of Nature in this His 'beginning of miracles.' We cannot comprehend the process by which a grape-seed often becomes a large tree. Go to Hampton Court, and look at the wonderful vine of which King George III. was so fond; and you will wonder at its size, remembering it commenced with a grape-seed. Nor can we comprehend how the vine blossoms and bears grapes, and how the rain and other moisture is converted into the richest and most precious juice. You and I who believe in God, know that all this is brought about by Him—for His energy perpetually fills all Nature. To *us*, therefore, it is not incredible that the Divine Redeemer changed that water into wine, at the marriage of Cana in Galilee—only we are sure that the change was miraculous.

Matthew was not a disciple at that early time—so he would not see the miracle; and, perhaps, some of the other disciples thought their Master's first miracle obscured by the greater miracles that

followed. John, the beloved disciple, fondly goes back in memory, during his old age, to this beginning of his Master's miracles—more especially because the other evangelists had passed it by. John could not be deceived in what he saw, the quantity of water that was changed into wine would render that impossible. A trick might have been played with a mere jugful of water: not so with the water that filled six water-pots of stone used for washing of hands.

The loving and aged evangelist mentions the time—"the third day," and the very words that passed—shewing how legibly the whole transaction was engraved in his memory. His description is simple and unpretending. He could have no prospect of gain in writing his Gospel—now his age was so great. He had seen his Master die on the cross; and his own brother James had been beheaded by Herod, for his adherence to Christianity. He had been imprisoned, beaten and banished, and was now nearly one hundred years old. What reward could he obtain by testifying to a falsehood? We can think of none, and conclude that he was testifying to what he knew to be a truth.

The two "Miracles of the loaves and fishes," or miraculous feeding of the five thousand, in one case—and of the four thousand in the other—come naturally the next in order, for our consideration. The feeding of the five thousand is recorded by the four Evangelists, and the feeding of the four thousand by two of them. Critics would have expended their ingenuity in "proving" that the record is a mistake, and that there was but *one* feeding of the multitude, if it had not been for those words of Christ, in Peter's boat :—

"When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto Him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven."

Some of you are familiar with the objection of Strauss—that miracles of such a nature are utterly impossible, because a miracle is a Divine work, and God does not make bread : He makes corn. And, that when we place distinctly before our minds *all* that Christ must have done, in order to accomplish such miracles as these, we shall perceive their utter

absurdity. For, bread, it is reasoned, is first corn ; then the corn has to be sown, grown, ripened, reaped, and gathered in ; then it has to be threshed, winnowed, and ground into flour ; then it has to be mixed with water, kneaded into paste ; and finally baked in an oven—or it is not *bread*. *Ergo*—if Christ gave real bread to the multitude, He had first to create the corn, and then put it through all these processes, with inconceivable rapidity ! And who can believe in such an absurdity ? ask the followers of Strauss.

Does not a single thought, borrowed from the facts of chemistry, dissipate all the fog and mist of this seeming absurdity and impossibility ?

What is corn ? So much carbon, nitrogen, potash, etc., etc. And whose creation is the carbon, etc. ? God's only. And must it not be as easy for Him to bring carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen, potash, etc., together in the shape of bread, as it is for Him to bring them together in the form of corn and water ? Is not the growth of corn—what we call its “natural” growth—really as mysterious as these miracles ? We can allege no cause *why* a grain of corn should become a plant bearing fifty or more

grains, save that it is the Maker's will. And if a man had never heard of the sowing of corn, and never seen it grown and reaped, and were suddenly told that by sowing one grain he might reap fifty grains—would he readily believe it?

The four Evangelists describe the feeding of the multitude as really miraculous: "they all ate, and were filled." It was no deception of their senses. They were not, magically, made to feel as if their hunger was appeased. Nor could bread have been bought suddenly in a "desert place" sufficient to appease their hunger; nor could it have been borne up the mountain without their seeing it. What bread-dealer, dwelling in any of the towns around the Lake of Gennesareth, could have supplied a sudden order to furnish loaves for several thousands of hungry people? And if such a dealer had furnished the loaves, and promised to keep the secret,—would he not soon have betrayed it?

The disciples could not be deceived. The men, women, and children—for the multitude fed by the first miracle were going to the Passover—would be six or seven thousand. Five hundred human beings would have to be served by each apostle; the grass

was "green," says Peter's interpreter—so it was not dark; the multitude sat all in "ranks," and in companies of fifty and one hundred; they were not all in an uneasy crowd, moving about, but *sitting*. So the disciples could see and count the whole company that was fed.

We cannot wonder that the multitude wanted to take Christ "by force, to make Him a king." He had transcended the usual order of Nature. He had observed no "conditions of Science." Many times the quantity of bread derived from the lad's store, at the beginning, remained at the end. The multitude could not doubt that they had witnessed a miracle.

Books on the miracles seldom mention but one miraculous fact recorded in the last chapter of John's Gospel: the miraculous draught of fishes. But I want you to notice another. The apostles had left Jerusalem, temporarily, to meet their risen Lord on the mountain in Galilee. They seem to have taken the opportunity to visit their families—most likely with the purpose of removing them to Jerusalem. The neighbourhood of the Lake

tempts them to try their old employment once more.

“I go a-fishing,” said Peter. They say unto him, “We also go with thee.” And so seven of the eleven went a-fishing, forgetting that they were now ordained to be “fishers of men,” and doubtful that God would provide for them. They toiled all night, and caught nothing. Next morning, Jesus stands on the shore, and asks them if they have any food. And they answer, “No ;” and then He bids them cast the net on the right side of the ship, and they shall find. They obey Him, and soon, they were not able to draw the net for the multitude of fishes.

Their eyes had been “holden” hitherto, as were the eyes of the disciples going to Emmaus ; but when the proper time comes, Christ is known by them. And “as soon as they were come to land, they saw there a fire of coals, *and fish laid thereon, and bread.*” They needed not to trouble themselves to go a-fishing. Christ had provided for them, and *would* have provided for them, if they had trusted Him.

“No doubt,” acknowledges some sceptical friend,

"it is a most pleasing picture which the writers of the Gospels draw of Jēsus, so long as we only see the brighter part of it. No one can read the words of Christ, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat," and then think of His feeding them miraculously, without admiring the picture. But the picture drawn of Jesus of Nazareth by the Gospel writers has its very dark and repulsive shadows. Think of His cursing the fig-tree, and the drowning of the pigs ! Are such deeds worthy of Him whom you call holy and divine ? "

I answer that Christ's words are, "Let no man eat fruit of thee hereafter." He does *not* curse—He does *not* display anger towards a tree. The charge, so often made, is a foolish one. Peter says, "Master, the fig-tree that Thou cursedst (or *didst doom*) is withered away ; but this is Peter's own way of describing what he conceives his Master to have done : Christ did *not* curse.

He selects the fig-tree, so green and full of leaves, and apparently flourishing, but so destitute of fruit, for an object on which to grave, very signally, a moral lesson. His act is *oriental*, like much of His

teaching : He fixes truths, lastingly, in the minds of His disciples by figurative words, or by outward emblems. Jerusalem and its people—the *real* fig-tree, so full of profession and so barren of fruit—lay before Him. The Judge of all things was weary of mockery, and the withering of the *real* fig-tree was at hand. He describes the destruction and doom of Jerusalem, shortly after ; and then, again, He says, “Now learn a parable of the fig-tree”—as if He did not wish them to forget the former *parable*—for so it may be called—of the withered fig-tree.

As for the paltry objection, so often coarsely urged, that Jesus had no right to destroy other people’s property—it is enough to reply that a barren tree could be of no use to anybody, and that the “*one tree*” (for so the Greek reads) stood in the highway from Bethany to Jerusalem, and might be said to belong to nobody.

To the *serious* question, as it is held to be—What right had Christ to destroy other people’s pigs? I return another question—What right had the Jews to keep pigs? Josephus shews us that, though the bulk of the population in the country in

which Gadara is situated was Gentile, yet there were many Jews there. They were, most likely, despisers and breakers of the law of Moses who kept these unclean animals, and Christ, rightfully, inflicts a judgment on them. They must have felt that His judgment was rightful, for they did not accuse Him, but "besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts."

The miraculous draughts of fishes—of which we have just mentioned one—were, simply, miracles to man : they were not miracles to the Saviour. It was easy for Him to give bread to multitudes in the desert ; and it was equally easy for Him, by His Divine power, to fill the nets of His fishermen-disciples with fishes. The fish with the stater in its mouth, which was to swallow the hook that Peter was commanded to cast into the sea, was also the creation of God, and must obey the Saviour's will. It may seem capricious or fantastic, in Christ, to perform such a miracle to those who will not stoop from their philosophy to enquire whether there was any rationality in this act of Christ. The tax was *not* a civil tax : it was not a

payment to Cæsar; but the half-shekel ordained to be paid by every Israelite above twenty years old for the service of the temple: a tax for the service of the Divine Father—from which, Christ shews, the Divine Son is free.

That the Saviour walks on the sea—in spite of the force of gravitation, and all other “conditions of Science”—that He thus transcends the usual order of Nature—is miraculous to many; but it was no miracle to Him. The Lord of Nature could enable that human body, in which He mysteriously dwelt, to walk on the sea as easily as upon the land.

He also stilled the tempest as easily. He that formed the winds and the waves said, “Peace, be still!” and He was obeyed.

If no other miracle of Christ than this were recorded in the New Testament, sceptics might attempt to get over it in the way that Professor Tyndall thinks he disposes of what Christians call “answers to prayer.” They might say the wind *happened* to cease, and the waves *happened* to subside, at the moment that Jesus of Nazareth spoke.

But then it is written so often that Jesus spake, and a miracle was done. Sceptics would hardly like to make themselves look foolish by saying "The leprosy *happened* to vanish when Jesus touched the man: the deaf and dumb man *happened* to recover his hearing and speech while Jesus touched him"—and so on.

And this miracle of Jesus must have been real. The disciples were in the habit of passing whole days and nights upon the lake of Gennesareth. Jesus was asleep, and, in their fear, they wake Him, crying, "Lord, save us! we perish!" And He stilled both winds and waves, and there was a great calm. What wonder that they exclaimed, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the waves obey Him!" The boat had been filled with water, and they were "in jeopardy," says Luke; and now they were suddenly delivered. They could not have dreamt all this. The miracle must have been as real as it was astounding and sublime.

XIV.

THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST EVIDENT PROOFS OF
THE DEITY OF CHRIST.

YOU will all have gathered, by occasional expressions I have used in addressing you, that I hold the miracles of Christ to be among the strongest proofs of His Divinity. The description, by the Evangelists, of the manner and behaviour of Christ while performing His miracles demonstrates Him not to have been a mere delegate of the Almighty. The Saviour declares that the works which He does are His Father's works ; but He also manifests that they are His own.

"I will : be thou clean !" He says to the leper. "Peace, be still !" He says to the winds and waves. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," is the sublime answer He gives to the cavillers who do not, and cannot, deny His deeds of healing—but affirm that He is not of God, because He heals on the Sabbath.

They seek to stone Him for uttering these remarkable words, saying, He makes Himself equal with God. That His opposers interpreted His words as a claim—nay, an assertion of His Divinity—is thus very clear, although some modern critics affirm that His words have no such meaning. I see no cause to doubt Christ's meaning. If He had been merely a man, and a pious man, He would not have dared to use language—and to use it so often as He did—which He must have known would mislead those who heard Him to conclude that He was asserting His own Divinity.

The remarkable words of Christ which I have quoted seem to express a sublime truth which Jesus could hardly have reached, if He had been merely a man—merely the humble Carpenter's son. "My Father worketh hitherto:" that is to say, He supports the whole frame of Nature: by the unceasing energy of Him who is always present everywhere, the forces and order of Nature are maintained: they could not exist without Him; and they exist solely because He wills it every moment, and thus He "worketh hitherto." Call

these remarkable words of Christ to mind while you contemplate any of His miracles, and feel how each miracle seems to be an illustration of these words.

Be it remembered that the Bible never tells us that man—any more than devils—can perform miracles. God does not depute man—any more than devils—to take His place. He does not commit His omnipotence into the keeping of any of His creatures. “God,” says Dr. Wardlaw, with forcible eloquence, “does not make His creature, for the time, almighty: that would be making him God.”

Neither is it fitting to call a mere man the Maker’s “instrument,” in performing a miracle. Man can only be a messenger from God, or an indicator or pointer-out that a miracle will be performed. Sometimes, as in the case of Elisha, a prayer to God is offered, and the prayer is answered. Only in one instance, that of the raising of Lazarus, does Christ intimate to us that He has prayed, before the miracle: and then He immediately declares that He uttered the prayer solely for the sake of those standing by. His

miracles are not evident answers to prayer. Compare Christ with others.

Moses did *not* perform miracles. *He* did not create the frogs, or turn the Nile into blood—or divide the Red Sea, and enable the Israelites to walk through, or across its channel, on dry land. *He* did not (as Christ said) give them manna in the wilderness, or bring the quails to them. *He* did not bring them water out of the rock. But, eminent as Moses was in holiness, we learn that he forgot himself—under the repeated provocation of the ungrateful and rebellious Israelites—so far as to arrogate to himself a share of Divine power.

“Ye rebels! shall *we* bring you water out of this rock?” were his presumptuous words. “Shall *we*”—as if he and his brother Aaron were in partnership with Jehovah! He dishonoured his Maker; and his punishment was—that he should not enter the promised land!

Elijah could *not* perform miracles. He could not restore the dead child to life—but had to utter his cry to God—“O Lord my God, I pray Thee, let this child’s soul come into him again!” Neither

could his successor, Elisha—who sent his staff, by his servant, Gehazi, to lay upon the face of a dead child, but in vain—and then had to go to the child, and to “shut the door upon them twain,” and to pray, and shew other signs of earnestness, before God would heal the child.

The apostles could *not* perform miracles. When their Master gave them their commission, He must have shewed them that they had no power themselves to perform miracles. Look at Peter and John when they see the lame man laid at the Beautiful gate of the temple, and the man asks an alms of them. Peter and John fasten their eyes on him, and Peter says, “Look on us! Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have, I give unto thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”

Some people have a notion that any of Christ’s apostles could perform miracles when and where they pleased—at any hour of the day or night; in Jerusalem, or elsewhere. They could do nothing of the kind. No doubt they were informed—by an inward Divine impression—when God was about to perform a miracle, or willed it. And

I strongly suspect, the miracle would not have been performed, if they had not fully believed in the Divine impression. Listen to Peter when he is declaring to the people that ran together in Solomon's porch, how the lame man has been restored. He tells them that they had denied the Holy One and the Just, and killed the Prince of Life, whom God had raised from the dead. "And His name," he says, "*through faith in His name*, hath made this man strong: yea, *the faith which is by Him* hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."

Now look at the Saviour, when He is performing miracles. The poor leper says, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." Christ says, "I will—be thou clean!" and immediately the leper is cleansed. Do you not remember the words—"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work"? "Lord, save us—we perish!" cry the affrighted disciples, in the storm. "And He arose, and rebuked the winds and the waves—and said, Peace, be still! and there was a great calm." Do you not remember the words—"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work"? What did Chri :

say? "As the Father raiseth the dead, and quickeneth whom He will, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will." And He raised the daughter of Jairus, and the widow's son of Nain, and Lazarus of Bethany, from the dead, and quickened them (made them alive). Do you not see how His sublime declaration is thus embodied in facts—"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work"?

But, to my mind, Christ's language, when He heals the paralytic, is the strongest confirmation of His own Divinity. "Son, be of good cheer," He says, "thy sins be forgiven thee!" And when those who were sitting by said He blasphemed, Christ said, "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise and walk? But that ye may know that *the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins*, I say, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house."

We do not wonder that His enemies said, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" for we feel that the forgiveness of sin belongs to God alone. But Christ here declared, in the strongest manner, that

He had "power on earth to forgive sins." If we believe that He was what He said He was—"the Way, *the Truth*, and the Life"—we must believe that He spoke the truth, when He said He could forgive sin. Could He, possibly, give us a stronger assurance than that, of His own glorious Divinity?

It is the Divinity of Christ which gives efficacy to His atonement for sin. It is impossible, therefore, to exaggerate the *value* of the Miracles of Christ, or the importance of their *verity*.

XV.

AFTER-THOUGHTS.

I SAID, at page 68,—“We will reserve all discussion respecting Christ’s Temptation in the Wilderness, until we get farther on. But, instead of entering on an Enquiry which really needs a volume to do any measure of justice to it, I deem it better to omit the discussion altogether. And I will give the Reader my honest reason for so doing. My mind is not made up as to the *real form* of the Temptation of Christ: whether to regard the narrative of Matthew and Luke as a narrative of facts—as the description of a vision—or, as a parabolic description of His own mental conflict, given by the Saviour to His disciples. Sometimes, I incline to one interpretation, and sometimes to another; and, I repeat, I judge it is better to say so, and leave the discussion untouched.

If a man thinks, he cannot fail to change his opinions on many subjects in the course of seventy years. On some subjects—after weighing facts and arguments, daily, for many years—I still remain in dubiety, while on others my mind is made up, very strongly and decidedly. Some of the readers of this little volume may have been readers of the “Critical Exegesis of Gospel History, on the basis of Strauss’s ‘Leben Jesu,’” which I inserted in “Cooper’s Journal,” in 1850. Twenty-six years have gone over my head, and I am now defending many things which I then impugned.

I thank God, however, that I have held fast one precious conviction, all the way through life. It is the conviction expressed in the following words, which were prefixed to that same “Critical Exegesis”:—

“I yield to none in fervent admiration and love for the character of Christ. Under all changes of opinion, his moral beauty has ever kept its throne in my heart and mind, as the most worshipful of all portraitures of goodness. I seek to multiply, not to lessen, the number of his true disciples.

Deeply convinced that the rapid growth of enquiry, and the spread of scientific information, among the great body of the People, are destroying all belief in what is evidently legendary, I am anxious to aid the preservation, in some minds, at least, of continued and purified attachment to the substance of Christianity, while its shadows are being dispelled. I know no higher teaching than Christ's : I acknowledge none. But His religion no longer commends itself to me by mysterious or miraculous sanctions. I hold it to be the most perfect version of the Religion of Humanity ; and, for that reason, desire to see it divested of all legendary incrustations that may prevent its reception with sincere and earnest thinkers."

So I wrote, while fast bound in the logical net of Strauss. Gradually, the strong conviction grew within me that the perfectly holy and spotless character of Christ itself was a miracle, and the greatest of all miracles ; and that, as I did not believe this perfect character to be legendary, I was inconsistent in regarding the miraculous acts of this perfect Christ as mere legends. My heart could not give up its worship of the one, and

so my reason came back to its worshipful reception of the other. And thus I, gradually, broke away from Strauss's net, and returned to the loving faith in the Saviour, which I had experienced in early life.

"If any man will do His will," says Christ, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." They are words which seem to me more and more weighty, every day of my life, and compel me to think that many disbelieve Christianity, because they are unwilling to believe it. I am sure that with some leading sceptics of my own time, whom I have known intimately, *the pride of being logical* was their highest motive and the very idol of their affections. I verily believe if Jesus could have been presented to them—were it possible—as a thousand times holier than he is presented to us in the portrait of the Evangelists, the presentation would not win them. They must have their logical queries fully resolved, or they will remain unbelievers still.

I impeach no man's sincerity, in saying this, God forbid! I would do battle in defence of the sincerity of the very men I am thinking of, though

a host should oppose me. But I must make this full and free declaration, that I believe, what Blaise Pascal first taught, and Bishop Butler afterwards so well and clearly enforced, is true—that what are called the Evidences of Christianity will seldom suffice to win a man to faith, who has no wish to believe.

Common as it is for writers on the Evidences to assert; that it needs but the employment of their ordinary powers of understanding for men to become convinced of the Truth of Christianity, I believe that that is not true. A man may exercise much more than merely ordinary powers of understanding and consideration upon the very clearest array of “the Evidences,” and yet be unconvinced. He abides by his own laboriously-erected standard of logic; and he rejects all portraitures of moral beauty and excellence which accompany the array of evidence—for, measured by *his* standard of logic, the array of evidence is most fatally defective, and he therefore rejects the moral portrait, however beautiful, as having no claim on his attachment.

I find that I must receive many things for solid

truth which I cannot reason out, logically. I dare not pass judgment on other men. They are answerable to their Maker, only. I cannot live in a world of cold negations. It is a wonder to me that other men can live in such a world. But I do not condemn them for it. I only wish that they felt the satisfaction, the happiness, the thankfulness that I feel in receiving Christianity. My heart's desire and prayer to God is—that they may speedily receive it, also.

THE END.

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